

THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
'WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT



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The Poetical Works
of
Wilfrid Scawen Blunt

A COMPLETE EDITION

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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PREFACE

IN issuing, thirty years ago, the fourth edition of my *Sonnets of Proteus*, I wrote: "No life is perfect that has not been lived—youth in feeling—manhood in battle—and old age in meditation. Again, no life is perfect that is not sincere."

• To-day, having reached the third stage of a long life very much of action, I yield to an impulse (I think a prudent one) of old age; that of arranging for the publication of a final and complete edition of my verse while I still can, instead of leaving that care, should it be needed, to the chance kindness of others after my death. I am the more impelled to this because it seems that latterly my work, nearly all of it out of print, has begun to have a certain *bric-à-brac* value with readers, as that of a mid-Victorian poet a little in advance of his epoch, and because the only edition of it at all procurable is a selection issued sixteen years ago by my two friends, both, alas, now dead before me, W. E. Henley and George Wyndham, which, under the heading *The Poetry of Wilfrid Blunt*, gives what it gives of it much cut down and, if I may use the word in an unexaggerated sense, Bowdlerised. I mean especially,

that all that section of it, which was the outcome of my feelings and beliefs on things political or religious, or which on other grounds they held to be unpopular, was rigorously censored, so that what remained can no longer be regarded as a quite sincere expression of my thoughts. I am unwilling to allow my work to stand permanently at that point, however friendly the intention was on the part of those who so edited it. Henley, in his introduction to the selected volume, understood that this would be the case with me. He foresaw that I should not acquiesce in the permanent exclusion of much that they had suppressed for this reason of unpopularity, and it is no more than the truth to say that I hold it to be a point of honour to retain, as I do in the present edition, the whole original text at whatever disadvantage. *The Wind and the Whirlwind*, *The Canon of Aughrim*, *A New Pilgrimage*, and *Satan Absolved* (the last written to some extent in collaboration with the late Herbert Spencer) are quite as much, and as sincerely, a part of my 'past self as are the *Sonnets of Proteus*, *Griselda*, or *An Idler's Calendar*; and to exclude them from a Complete Edition would be a recantation of feelings and opinions for which in honour I am now prepared. All, therefore, will be found here as first put in print, with the excised stanzas of *Esther* restored to their place, and a great deal else which for other than artistic reasons was omitted from the Henley Volume.

At the same time it has been thought well to add to it a number of hitherto unpublished pieces, amounting to some three hundred pages, the work of comparatively recent years, and among them three rhymed plays, one of which was acted at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1907,

and a sheaf of new sonnets and lyrics, the latest completed piece being (with the dedicatory Ode, in memory of George Wyndham) that which stands at the end of the second volume. It is called *The Wisdom of Merlyn*, and gives an old man's view (and I am seventy-three) of the philosophy of living. With this I am content to close my account with my activities of verse, repeating what I said long ago about the "Age of Meditation," which is all now left for me of a strenuous and, on the whole, singularly happy life.

W. S. B.

NEWBUILDINGS PLACE, SUSSEX,
May 6, 1914.

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ESTHER
A SONNET SEQUENCE

ESTHER,
A YOUNG MAN'S TRAGEDY

I

~WHEN is life other than a tragedy,
Whether it is played in tears from the first scene,
In sable robes and grief's mute pageantry,
For loves that died ere they had ever been,
Or whether on the edge of joys set keen,
While all the stage with laughter is agog,
•Death stepping forward with an altered mien
Pulls off his mask, and speaks the epilogue ?
Life is a play acted by dying men,
Where, if its heroes seem to foot it well
And go light-tongued without grimace of pain,
Death will be found anon. And who shall tell
Which part was saddest, or in youth or age,
When the tired actor stops and leaves the stage ?

II

Yes, who shall tell the value of our tears, .

Whether we wept aright or idly grieved ?

There is a tragedy in unloved years,

And in those passionate hours by love deceived,

In lips unloved and hopes too soon bereaved,

And youth's high courage which no strength could save,

And manhood's web of fate by folly weaved,

And grey-haired grief brought down into the grave.

Who shall distinguish truly and be wise

'Twixt grief and grief, 'twixt night and night ? The sun
Has its own sorrow and a voice that cries

Louder than darkness of its joys undone,

And pleads with that exceeding bitter cry,

" I have tasted honey, and behold, I die ! "

III

A little honey ! Ay, a little sweet,

A little pleasure when the years were young,

A joyous measure trod by dancing feet,

A tale of folly told by a loved tongue.

These are the things by which our hearts are wrung

More than by tears. Oh, I would rather laugh,

So I had not to choose such tales among

Which was most laughable. Man's nobler half

Resents mere sorrow. I would rather sit

With just the common crowd that watch the play

And mock at harlequin and the clown's wit,

And call it tragedy and go my way.

I should not err, because the tragic part

Lay not in these, but sealed in my own heart.

ESTHER

IV

And thus it is. The tale I have to tell
Is such another. He who reads shall find
That which he brings to it, of Heaven or Hell
For his best recompense where much is blind,
A jest-book or a sermon or mere wind,—
Each as he may,—for life's least godly mirth
Is mingled strangely here with fate unkind,
And this is a true story of the Earth.
The passionate heart of youth with its desires
Is not all noble, and some baseness clings
For ever mixed with its eternal fires,
Else were it single among human things.
And all life's wisdom learns but this last plan,
To jest at tears and weep Man's mirth and Man.

V

I had been an hour at Lyons. My breath comes
Fast when I think of it. An hour, no more,
I trod those streets and listened to the drums,
The mirth, the music, and the city's roar,
And found no sermon for me in her stones.
It was the evening of St. Martin's fair,
And all the world, its working bees and drones,
Had gone out to the quays in the sweet air,
To taste that thing more sweet to human breath,
Its own mad laughter at its own mad kind.
“An hour of prayer,” I mused, “for men of faith.
Yet all these worshippers were only blind.
And I, no whit less blind, among them went
In search of pleasure for my punishment.

VI

The Lyons fair! In truth it was a Heaven
 For idlers' eyes, a feast of curious things,
 Swings, roundabouts, and shows, the Champions Seven,
 Dramas of battles and the deaths of kings,
 The whole Place d'Armes grown white as if with snow,
 With canvas booths arrayed in triple lines,
 And jugglers, lions, snakes from Mexico,
 Dancers on tight ropes, clowns and columbines.
 I went among them all with grave intent,
 I, too, to find it may be some delight.
 I was a boy and knew not what life meant,
 Nor what the pleasures were men seek in it.
 Only I knew that mingling with that throng,
 I was a stranger a strange world among.

VII

I had made my round, as yet with little gain
 Of undiscovered good in that gay place.
 I had sought my share of pleasure, but in vain.
 Laughter was not for me, and hid her face.
 I had asked for mirth. The oracles were dumb.
 No sound of Folly with her tinkling feet
 Had bid my own feet follow, and no home
 Was mine for merriment or musings sweet.
 I had ceased to hope and almost ceased to seek,
 When, from the farthest booth of all, the bray
 Of brass and drums and fiddling and the shriek
 Of a dwarf's voice invited me to stay.
 The crowd, as scenting some more mirthful thing,
 Surged round that booth agape and wondering.

VIII

It was a booth, no larger than the rest,
No loftier fashioned and no more sublime,
As poor a shrine as ever youth possessed
In which to worship truth revealed in time.
Yet to my soul the mean remembrance clings
With all the folly of that far fair eve,
And my pulse throbs with lost imaginings,
And passion rises from its grave to grieve.
Vain dreams, brute images! and over all
The shrill-voiced dwarf its hierarch and priest,
Vaunting its praise, a pagan prince of Baal.
It scared me as of some wild idol feast.
"The Booth of Beauty," thus it was I read,
Blazoned in scarlet letters overhead.

IX

I stopped, I listened, and I entered in,
With half-a-dozen more, that sight to see.
"The Booth of Beauty," 'twas a name of sin
Which seemed to promise a new mystery.
There was a crowd already in the place,
And 'twixt me and the stage, now darkly hid,
The gathering evening had come down apace,
And all was dim within and overspread.
I know not by what instinct or mute proof
Of Providence it was, but this is true,
Even as I stepped 'neath that ignoble roof,
A prescience warned me there of portents new,
And a voice spoke with no uncertain sound
Warning me back as from ungodly ground.

X

An instant, just an instant, and no more, .
And it was gone, and I with eyes unsealed
Saw the bald pageant stripped to its thought's core,
And naked there to my scared eyes revealed.
Upon a throne which filled the upper space
Two female monsters sat, the first a girl
Marked like a leopard with pied arms and face,
And restless eyes aflame and teeth of pearl.
Her as we ventured near, I heard awhile
Say she was hungry, and a gleam like blood
Lighted her lips and died in a fierce smile.
A woman's hand behind me in the crowd
Clutched at my arm, and through the booth there went
A shiver of half fear, half merriment.

XI

Beyond her sat a second monster. She
In shape and sense was undisguisedly real,
An ox-eyed queen of full-fed majesty
And giant height and comeliness ideal.
She too her tale related, as was due,
In measured tones, her age, her birth, her name,
Bourgeois her parents, friends of order too,
And good Imperialists of honest fame,
Her age eighteen, her height seven feet, her waist
An ell and more in its circumference,
Her leg above the knee, and where was placed
Its point of full development. . . The sense
Of the rest I lost, for laughing half aloud
Again a woman touched me in the crowd.

ESTHER

XII

She was a little woman dressed in black,
Who stood on tiptoe with a childish air,
Her face and figure hidden in a *sacque*,
All but her eyes and forehead and dark hair.
Her brow was pale, but it was lit with light,
And mirth flashed out of it, it seemed in rays.
A childish face, but wise with woman's wit,
And something, too, pathetic in its gaze.
In the bare dusk of that unseemly place
• I noted all, and this besides, a scar
Which on her cheek had left a paler trace.
It seemed to tell its tale of love and war.
That little scar ! Doubt whispered of this one,
Boy as I was, she had not lived a nun.

XIII

A second warning, nor unheeded. Yet
The thought appealed to me as no strange thing,
Pure though I was, that love impure had set
Its seal on that fair woman in her Spring.
Her broken beauty did not mar her grace
In form or spirit. Nay, it rather moved.
It seemed a natural thing for that gay face
It should have known and suffered and been loved.
It kindled in me, too, to view it thus,
A mood of daring which was more than mine,
And made my shamefaced heart leap valorous,
And fired its courage to a zeal divine.
All this, in one short instant, as I gazed
Into her eyes, admiring, yet amazed.

XIV

Me, too, she doubtless read. For, with her hand
Raised as for help and pointing to a chair,
She bade me, with a gesture, part command
And part entreaty, I would set her there.
She could not see, she said, the Queen of Love
My eyes so coveted, and laughed and laid
Upon my lips the fingers of her glove
When I protested at the words she said.
I hardly know how it all came about
But did her bidding as she would, and she
From her new vantage bore the humour out
And mocked the more at each new mockery.
And still she held my arm and I her dress,
“Lest she should fall,” she said, in waywardness.

XV

Thus it began with laughter. But anon
The ox-eyed queen, who had resumed by rote
The tale of her perfections one by one,
Turned by some ominous chance towards the spot
Where we two stood. “And take good note,” said she,
“All here is honest beauty, flesh and blood,
As any in the world. Yet, if there be
A doubt between you, let me make it good.
Which of you two will honour me so near
As to prove the truth?” My cheeks in spite of me
Flamed in the dark, and I was seized with fear
And a wild doubt lest mine the choice should be.
The little woman on the chair began
To shout aloud and bid me play the man.

XVI

Oh, 'tis a terrible thing in early youth
To be assailed by laughter and mute shame,
A terrible thing to be befooled forsooth
By one's own foolish face betrayed in flame.
The little traitor, when she saw me dumb,
Went on to clap her hands, till all and each
Took up the jest and called on me to come
And prove my courage in the manly breach.
The imperious queen stood waiting for me there,
Pointing and beckoning, and the crowd closed in.
Under the cover of a wilder air
From the brass band, the darkness and the din,
I know not how it was, in fear or fun,
I touched that monster's knee, and all was done.

XVII

I touched that knee. She did not show surprise,
And the earth had not opened at our feet.
She did not even laugh. Her foolish eyes
Twinkled a moment in her cheeks, then set
Like fog-bound stars for ever from my sight.
And at a signal from the little woman,
Who clung to me still, a chorus left and right
Of laughter rose Homeric and inhuman,
Drowning all further sense in one wild roar.
I heard the spotted girl with leopard lips
Complain that she was hungry as before,
And all the world was merged in an eclipse,
Darkening the air around and overhead,
And then I broke away and turned and fled.

XXII

You know the story of my birth, the name
 Which I inherited for good and ill,
 The secret of my father's fame and shame,
 His tragedy and death on that dark hill.
 You know at least what the world knows or knew,
 For time has taken half the lookers-on,
 As it took him, and leaves his followers few,
 And those that loved him scarce or almost none.
 To me, his son, there had remained the story,
 Told and retold by her who knew it best,
 A mystery of love, perhaps of glory,
 A heritage to hold and a bequest.
 Ah, how it loved him, that sad woman's heart,
 What faith was hers and what a martyr's part !

XXIII

Nor later, when with her my childhood died,
 Was life less sealed to me. The Church became
 My guardian next and mother deified,
 Who lit within me a more subtle flame
 Of constancy, and clothed me in her mood.
 No sound, no voice within *that* sanctuary
 Told me of common evil. Unsubdued
 And vast and strange, a thing from which to flee,
 The world lay there without us. We within,
 Fenced in and folded safe in our strong home,
 Knew nothing of the sorrow and the sin.
 'Tis no small matter to have lived in Rome,
 In the Church's very bosom and abode,
 Cloistered and cradled there, a child of God.

XXIV

Thus through these griefs I had been set apart,
As for a double priesthood. Life to me,
In those first moments when I probed my heart,
Less an enchantress seemed than enemy.
My knowledge of the world had nothing human.
I saw Mankind a tribe, my natural foe,
Whom I must one day battle with; and Woman,
Ah! Woman was a snare I did not know.
Indeed, it may be that already hope
Knocked at my soul with tales it dared not own
Of woman's kindness in my horoscope.
Man, only Man I feared with eyes bent down,
Man the oppressor, who with pale lips curled
Sheds blood in the high places of the world.

XXV

My childhood, then, had passed a mystery
Shrouded by death, my boyhood a shut thing.
The passion of my soul as it grew free
With growing youth, a bird with broken wing,
Knew nothing of its strength to dare or do,
Or, if it dreamed of battle still to come,
That was its secret hidden in the blue
Of life's great vault of tears which was its doom,
A duty of revenge some day for blood.
Enough! You know I held me from the press
To whom base things are nothing, that I stood
Parted from this world's weekday wickedness
By a whole legend of romance sublime,
Perhaps by the dead virtue of a crime.

XXVI

I linger on the threshold of my youth. .

If you could see me now as then I was,
A fair-faced frightened boy with eyes of truth
Scared at the world yet angry at its laws,
Plotting all plots, a blushing Cataline
Betrayed by his own cheeks, a misanthrope
In love with all things human and divine,
The very fool of fortune and high hope,
You would deny you knew me. Oh, the days
Of our absurd first manhood, rich in force,
Rich in desire of happiness and praise
Yet impotent in its heroic course,
And all for lack of that one worthless thing,
Knowledge of life and love and suffering !

XXVII

At such a time indeed of youth's first morn,
There is a heaving of the soul in pain,
A mighty labour as of joys unborn,
Which grieves it and disquiets it in vain.
The soul is scared at her own lack of peace,
Her cradle song is mute, and she has fled
From her old life as to a wilderness.
She finds herself awake and without bread.
'Tis then the body, her new counsellor,
Speaks in her ear, and still with eloquence
Pleads for more action, and his voice to her
Is sweet with love, and sadly she consents.
There is a day of youth which needs must come
When each must learn his life and leave his home.

XXVIII

The summer I had passed in my own fashion
High in the Alps, a proselyte to toil.
I was released and free, and spent my passion
On the bare rocks as on a fruitful soil.
I had soothed my soul with labour, and its fire
Borne to those naked heights where I unfurled
My flag with new ambitions, high and higher
Even to the last bleak outposts of the world.
My soul had needed courage, and behold !
Here in these battles with the hosts of air
And rock and snow and storm she had grown bold
And proved her temper for the coming war.
This was her gain, the strife she must engage
With physical fear, her childhood's heritage.

XXIX

A glorious triumph. On that day of days
When, standing on the summit's utmost edge
Of my first mountain-top, I viewed the maze
Which I had travelled upwards, ledge on ledge,
And all that wilderness of rock and plain
Rolled at my feet, and, when with heel fast set
On Nature's neck, I knew the giant slain,
My thrall, my prisoner, on the parapet,
I was transfigured. Slowly in me rose
The throb of courage as a sense new born.
"Even Man," I cried, "Man's self, my foe of foes,
The phantom of my fears, shall feel my scorn
Yet in a nobler war." And trembling then
I seemed to stand, I too, a man with men.

XXX

Thus was my soul enfranchised. But anon,
With courage fired to full-fledged enterprise,
And pushing still the vantage I had won,
I sought communion with a world less wise,
The living world. I mixed with not a few,
Shepherds and countrymen, and village priests,
Bagmen at inns, and all the motley crew
Which comes and goes on market days and feasts
In old-world hostelries of old-world towns.
These gave a second schooling, till the grace
Of the summer ended on the upper downs,
And, carrying still its glory on my face,
I came to Lyons where these things befell.
The why and wherefore of it who shall tell ?

XXXI

The booths were shut. The Fair was at an end,
And the crowd gone with multitudinous feet
Noisily home, or lingering still to spend
At Café doors or at the turn of the street
In twos and threes its laughter with good-night.
All turned to silence. Even my heart had peace
As, self-possessed and freed from its vain fright,
I found myself once more upon the quays.
I stopped before the theatre grown dark,
With its extinguished lamps and blank repose
A scene of melancholy sad to mark,
Made sadder too by the white moon which rose
Behind it virginal with vaporous wings,
Aloof and careless of all earthly things.

XXXII

I had stopped to read a handbill of the play,
Caught by the lettering. Thus it was I read,
“ Programme of this night’s pieces, Saturday
The twentieth of October, ‘ X. Y. Z.,’
A piece in one act, and ‘ Les Bergers Fous,’
These to be followed by the well-known ‘ drame ’
Of ‘ Manon Lescaut,’ here brought out anew
For the first time at Lyons.” And a name
Followed in giant type of one who then
Illustrious stood in all the world of folly,
The most sublime Comedian known to men,
“ Mademoiselle Esther, Muse of Melancholy.”
She in her part of Manon, so ’twas writ,
Three nights would play in honour infinite.

XXXIII

Such was the legend. I had read it through
Twice ere I thought of thinking what it meant.
And as I turned with a sigh because I knew
That I alone perhaps of all who went
Homewards that night should bid good-night to none,
From a side door thrust open on the street
And calling as she passed in petulant tone
To one within who seemed to rouse her heat,
“ Ah, mauvais plaisant ! ” ere she slammed it to,
Out stepped my little woman of the Fair.
Her face was altered, but its form and hue,
If I had doubted in the moonlight there,
Was marked for me by that unaltered sign,
The little scar, its beauty’s underline.

XXXIV

She saw me in an instant, and stopped short
With a sudden change of look from fierce to gay.
Her black eyes gleamed with triumph as they caught,
Like some wild bird of chase, their natural prey.
“Ha, ha,” she cried, “*c’est lui, c’est l’ingénu.*”
Ah, vagabond! ’Tis thus you find me out.
Standing *en faction*, and at midnight too,
At the actors’ door, with no more fear or doubt
Than any sinner of them all. Oh wise!
Who would have guessed it? No. You shall not speak.
You shall not soil your innocent lips with lies
For any foolish reason in the week,
Nor for the year together if you told
Your stories here till both of us grew old.

XXXV

“Silence. I will not listen!” “And for what?”
She added strangely, in a softer mood.
“You see I am not angry. Do you not?
Only soft-hearted, and alas! too good.
Why did you follow me?” She took my hand
With a sudden action so devoid of guile
That I, who could not choose but understand,
Was softened too and fooled into a smile.
“Why did you follow me? Here, feel,” she said,
“How my heart beats. It frightens me to find
So much of cunning in so young a head,
So young a heart,—and mine which is not blind!”
She pressed my hand to her side. In truth, her heart
Was beating there, my own heart’s counterpart.

XXXVI

She watched me curiously with mocking eyes,
Yet tenderly, till once again her mirth
Prevailed with her, and quick in feigned surprise
Thrusting me back, "Ah, traitor!" she broke forth,
" 'Twas not for me then you were waiting there,
Not me, poor foolish me. The Queen of Love,
The woman of the booth! She was your care!
Monster! to dare me thus! And yet you prove
Your wit in vain, for, look, you foolish boy,
She cannot walk the streets like you and me,
Or the town would be at her heels." Convulsed with joy
•At this new jest she laughed remorselessly,
Till I was almost angry and inclined
To leave her there. And then she changed her mind.

XXXVII

She seemed to change as if with a change of the wind,
And growing serious sighed, "Now look," she said,
"You think me a mad woman and unkind,
But that is nonsense. I am sound of head
And not unsound of heart, ah, no, not there!
But you turn my head with your John the Baptist's face.
I will not be made jealous, so beware."
She looked entreatingly as if for grace,
And held me by the arm. "We are strangers both
Among these heavy Lyonnese. By right
We so should hold together. Tell me truth.
You never saw me, did you, till to-night?"
I said, "I came here not twelve hours ago!
Why should you think it?" "No," she broke in, "no.

XXXVIII

"I do not doubt it. You have a look of truth
 Which is beyond suspicion. But the world
 Is as full of knaves as fools. You have your youth
 And I my wisdom. Then your head is curled
 Just as I like it, and your face is smooth,
 And it can blush like your red innocent hands.
 I saw it in an instant in the booth
 That we should know each other and be friends.
 It does not do to question. Look at me.
 I am not pretty, yet the world's best sense
 Has raved about my beauty foolishly
 These five years past in every mood and tense !
 Say. Would you like we should be friends for good ?
 Not knowing what I said, I said I would.

XXXIX

"We shall be friends.. How friends ? You must know
 me first.
 What ? Like the Pont Neuf ? Should you wish it ? Well,
 None ever yet repented it who durst.
 Oh ! you shall know me as I dare not tell.
 You said I was not pretty. 'Tis the paint
 That ruins the complexion and the hours
 Spent at the footlights. These would rob a saint,
 Much more a sinner, of her natural powers,
Voilà la casse du métier ! Then, this scar,
 Some praise it as a beauty. They are fools.
 At best it but an honour is of war,
 And beauty is not measured by foot-rules.
 So you forgive it me, what need we care ?
 Fair faces are but signs of things more fair."

XL

She went on talking like a running stream,
Without more reason or more pause or stay
Than to gather breath and then pursue her whim
Just where it led her, tender, sad, or gay.
Her moods seemed all alike to her. But soon
With a little shudder, for the wind was chill
And we had lingered on there in the moon,
She bade me follow, and I bowed my will.
The torrent of her words had drowned in me
What humour of resistance there had been,
And the last sense of danger ceased to be
In the first joy of yielding to such sin.
There is no pleasure in the world so sweet
As, being wise, to fall at folly's feet.

XLI

Who might describe the humours of that night,
The mirth, the tragedy, the grave surprise,
The treasures of fair folly infinite
Learned as a lesson from those childlike eyes?
When we had left our river of fair hope,
The world once more engulfed us in its ways,
And street on street we passed, and shop on shop,
Still loitering by to peer within and praise.
At each new stall we stopped as if in doubt,
Asking a price, and in pretence to buy.
I thought she would have worn men's patience out
With her fool's talk while I stood idly by.
And still, as each grew warm, with cunning word
She turned their wrath from surly to absurd.

XLII

And so we went our way,—yes, hand in hand,
Like two lost children in some magic wood
Baffled and baffling with enchanter's wand
The various beasts that crossed us and withstood.
Each step was an experience. Every mood
Of that fair woman a fresh gospelling,
Which spoke aloud to me and stirred my blood
To a new faith, I knew not with what sting.
One thing alone I knew or cared to know,
Her strange companionship thus strangely won.
The past, the future, all of weal or woe
In my old life was gone, for ever gone.
And still to this I clung as one who clings
To hope's last hencoop in the wreck of things.

XLIII

How shall I tell my fall ? The life of man
Is but a tale of tumbles, this way thrown
At his beginning by mere haste of plan
In the first gaping ditch with flowers o'ergrown ;
Anon more cautious for his wounded knees,
Yet falling still through much expectancy ;
And so to age, the goal of his heart's ease,
Stumbling in blindness on he knows not why.
How shall I tell it ? As the poets tell
Who wrap love in a garment of vain light ?
Or plainly naked, the poor child of Hell
And laughter that it is and starless night ?
I like the truth best. Yet this love, sad thing,
Mired and defiled, I saw it once a king.

XLIV

We came at last, alas ! I see it yet,

With its open windows on the upper floor,
To a certain house still stirring, with lights set,

And just a chink left open of the door.

Here my companion stopped and bade me in ;

Her dressmaker's, she said. And I, who heard
A sound of women's voices from within,

Shrank back alarmed and ready at a word
From any damsel stoutly to deny.

But " Madame Blanche," she said to ease my fears,
" Is a good soul, and far too wise to pry

Or fancy evil of her customers

At any hour of the night they choose to come,
Much less of me." And so I followed dumb.

XLV

I followed dumb and shrinking like a thief

Close in her shadow from the women's guess,
Yet ruthlessly betrayed for my cheeks' grief

From head to foot in the tall pier-glasses.
My vagabond attire, my coat all rags,

My tattered plaid stained with the summer's dust,
The sash which bound my waist all gaps and jags,

With gaiters frayed and such sad shoes as must
Have served Ulysses at his journey's close ;

All these I saw revealed to my disgrace,
My hat still crowned with its last Alpine rose,

And what she had called my " John the Baptist's face
Red with confusion and the rage of youth,
I saw it all, the whole remorseless truth.

XLVI

Not so my little sponsor. She, with eyes
Proudly unconscious of my fool's display,
Talked volubly to all and scorned disguise,
While Madame Blanche herself, no less than they,
Smiled us a welcome, and with upraised hands
Disclaimed excuse and led us straightway through
To an inner room as to a Conference.

There I first saw to my amazement new
That fair white mystery, a woman's dress,
And heard its language spoken. Stuffs were brought
And cards unrolled before us, braids and lace
Lauded and handled and their merits taught
To ears that listened and to eyes that saw
Their secret sense, the law within the law.

XLVII

Sublime discussions ! Let who will be wise !
These are the things that touch us and transcend.
The logic of all beauty is surprise,
The reason of all love the unseen end.
Still as they argued on of this and that,
Turning perchance to me as an iter
Where in my corner I still speechless sat
To end their strife, my vision seemed to clear,
The scales fell from my eyes of ignorance,
The terror from my heart. One thing alone
Stood plain before me, the supreme fair chance
Of a first fortune, glorious and unknown,
Which beckoned me with no uncertain hand
To touch and taste and learn and understand.

XLVIII

Suddenly then my strange companion cried,
“ Bring me the body.” In a moment more
She had thrown off her hat, her veil untied,
And motioning all the women to the door,
While I sat speechless by who would have gone,
Undid her jacket and anon her dress,
With the jet buttons of it one by one,
And stood but clothed the more in loveliness,
A sight sublime, a dream, a miracle,
A little goddess from some luminous field
Brought down unconscious on our Earth to dwell,
And in an age of innocence revealed,
Naked but not ashamed. Nay, wherefore shame ?
And I, ah, who shall blame me, who shall blame ?

XLIX

I will not tell the secrets of that place.
When Madame Blanche returned to us again
I was kneeling there, while Esther kissed my face
And dried and comforted my tears. O vain
And happy tears ! O griefs thrice comforted !
I trembled, but not with fear. If I was dumb,
'Twas not for lack of speech where all was said.
My doubts were ended and my fears o'ercome,
And joy had triumphed. Life has given me much
And pleasure much, and Heaven may yet have store
Of nobler hopes to kindle and to touch,
But never for all time, ah, never more,
That delicate dawn of wonder when lips move
First to the love of life and love of love.

L

He who has once been happy is for aye .

Out of destruction's reach. His fortune then
Holds nothing secret, and Eternity,

Which is a mystery to other men,
Has like a woman given him its joy.

Time is his conquest. Life, if it should fret,
Has paid him tribute. He can bear to die.

He who has once been happy ! When I set
The world before me and survey its range,

Its mean ambitions, its scant fantasies,
The shreds of pleasure which for lack of change

Men wrap around them and call happiness,
The poor delights which are the tale and sum
Of the world's courage in its martyrdom ;

LI

When I hear laughter from a tavern door,

When I see crowds agape and in the rain
Watching on tiptoe and with stifled roar

To see a rocket fired or a bull slain,
When misers handle gold, when orators

Touch strong men's hearts with glory till they weep,
When cities deck their streets for barren wars

Which have laid waste their youth, and when I keep
Calmly the count of my own life and see

On what poor stuff my manhood's dreams were fed
Till I too learned what dole of vanity

Will serve a human soul for daily bread,
—Then I remember that I once was young
And lived with Esther the world's gods among.

LII

I lived with Esther, not for many days,
 If days be counted by the fall of night
 And the sun's rising, yet through years of praise,
 If truth be timepiece of joys infinite.
 And what a life it was! No vain sweet dream
 Of love in idleness which all men know,
 But a full drama fashioned on the theme
 Of strength victorious over death and woe.
 Here was no faltering. Ours the triumph was
 Of that strong logic which beholds each day
 As a new world to conquer, and the cause
 Itself complete of a more glorious fray.
 To-day our cycle was. In it sublime
 We sat enthroned as on the neck of Time.

LIII

For Esther was a woman most complete
 In all her ways of loving. And with me
 Dealt as one deals who careless of deceit
 And rich in all things is of all things free.
 She did not stop with me to feel her way
 Into my heart, because she all hearts knew,
 But, like some prodigal heir of yesterday
 Just in possession, counted not her due
 And grandly gave. O brave humility!
 O joy that kneels! O pride that stoops to tears!
 She spent where others had demanded fee,
 Served where all service had of right been hers,
 Casting her bread of life upon love's ways,
 Content to find it after many days.

LIV

I must not speak of it. Even yet my heart
Is but a feeble thing to fret and cry,
And it might chance to wake and with a start,
When nights were still and stars were in the sky,
Sit up and muse upon its lonely state,
With the same stars to mock at it as then,
And certain chords that touched might touch it yet,
And griefs find issue and tears come again.
I must not venture farther in this mood.
Grief is forsworn to me. I will not grieve,
Nor think too much on Esther's womanhood,
Rather on that which was its make-believe.
And yet awhile she loved me. In this thought
I long found rest when all was come to nought.

LV

We stayed at Lyons three days, only three,
In Esther's world of wonder and renown,
She, glorious star, each night immortally
Playing her Manons to the listening town.
I glorious too, but in Love's firmament,
Watching her face by which alone I moved,
A shadow near her raptured and intent,
And seeking still the signs that I was loved.
Thrice happy days! Thrice blessed tragedy!
Her Des Grieux was I, her lover lorn
Bound to her fortunes, blest to live or die,
And faithful ever though to faith forsworn,
Waiting behind the scenes in that stage-land
To greet her exits and to squeeze her hand.

LVI

Who has not wept with Manon ? Of all tales
That thrill youth's fancy or to tears or mirth
None other is there where such grief prevails,
Such passionate pity for the loves of Earth.
Who has not wept with Manon in her sin,
Wept in her punishment ? What angry heart
Has been unmoved in youth to see her win
With those sad archers to the inhuman cart ?
Who has not followed her beyond the seas,
And sold his life for her, and bowed his pride,
And sinned all sins to buy her back to ease,
And died all deaths to venge her when she died ?
And I, blest boy, who each new happy night
When all was done still lived in her delight !

LVII

This was my term of glory. All who know
Something of life will guess untold the end.
In love, one ever kisses for his woe,
One lends his cheek, alas ! or seems to lend,
One has the pleasure, one the penalties,
One is in earnest, one has time to laugh,
One turns impatient from imploring eyes,
And one in terror spells love's epitaph.
There was no wisdom in this love of mine,
Therefore it perished earlier than the rest,
Although I poured out all my heart like wine
And watered it with tears, and prayed unblest
In my soul's rage to all the Saints of heaven
To give me this and yet to be forgiven.

LVIII

It might not be. Some things are possible,
And some impossible for even God.
And Esther had no soul which Heaven or Hell
Could touch by joy or soften by the rod.
She could not really love me. The day came,
How soon, how late, I need not to devise,
When passion prayed its last, and only shame
Stood for my portion in a world grown wise,
And I went forth for ever from her sight
Knowing the good and evil. On that day
I did her wrong by anger. Now life's light
Illumines all, and I behold her gay
As I first knew her in my love purblind,
Dear passionate Esther, soulless but how kind !

THE LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

DEDICATION

TO ROBERT, LORD LYTTON

1880

I

TO ONE IN A HIGH POSITION

To you, a poet, glorious, heaven-born,
One who is not a poet but a son
Of the earth earthy, sick and travel-worn
And weary with a race already run,
A battle lost e'er yet his day is done,
Comes with this tribute, shattered banners torn
From a defeat. You reign in Macedon,
My Alexander, as at earlier morn
You reigned upon Parnassus, hero, king.
Reign no more, not even in those hearts
For which these songs were made, and if I sing
'Tis with a harsh and melancholy note
At which my own heart like an echo starts.
Yet sometimes I can deem you listening,
And then all else is instantly forgot.

PART I.—TO MANON

II

COMPARING HER TO A FALCON

BRAVE as a falcon and as merciless,
With bright eyes watching still the world, thy prey,
I saw thee pass in thy lone majesty,
Untamed, unmated, high above the press.
The dull crowd gazed at thee. It could not guess
The secret of thy proud ærial way,
Or read in thy mute face the soul which lay
A prisoner there in chains of tenderness.
—Lo, thou art captured. In my hand to-day
I hold thee, and awhile thou deignest to be
Pleased with my jesses. I would fain beguile
My foolish heart to think thou lovest me. See,
I dare not love thee quite. A little while
And thou shalt sail back heavenwards. Woe is me !

III

ON HIS FORTUNE IN LOVING HER

I did not choose thee, dearest. It was Love
That made the choice, not I. Mine eyes were blind
As a rude shepherd's 'who to some lone grove
His offering brings, and cares not at what shrine
He bends his knee. The gifts alone were mine ;
The rest was Love's. He took me by the hand,
And fired the sacrifice, and poured the wine,
And spoke the words I might not understand.
I was unwise in all but the dear chance
Which was my fortune, and the blind desire
Which led my foolish steps to Love's abode,
And youth's sublime unreasoned prescience
Which raised an altar and inscribed in fire
Its dedication : " To the unknown god."

IV

IN PRAISE OF HIS FATE

When I hear others speak of this and that
In our fools' lives which might have better gone,
Complaining idly of too niggard fate
And wishing still their senseless past undone,
I feel a childish tremor through me run,
Stronger than reason, lest by some far chance
Fate's ear to our sad plaints should yet be won
And these our lives be thrown back on our hands.
I tremble when I think of my past years,
My hopes, my aims, my wishes. All these days
I might have wandered far from Love and thee.
But kind fate held me, heedless of my prayers,
A prisoner to its wise mysterious ways,
And forced me to thy feet—ah fortunate me !

ON THE POWER OF HER BEAUTY

I am lighthearted now. An hour ago
 There was a tempest in my heaven, a flame
 Of sullen lightning under a bent brow
 And a dull muttering which breathed no name.
 Now all is changed. The very winds are tame,
 And the birds sing aloud from every bough,
 And my heart leaps. What empire dost thou claim,
 Child, o'er this Earth, that nature serves thee so ?
 Sublime magician ! Well may Earth and Heaven
 Change at thy bidding, and the hearts of men.
 Didst thou but know the power that beauty hath,
 The sea should leave his bed, the rocks be riven,
 And wise men, deeming chaos come again,
 Should kneel before thee and conjure thy wrath.

VI

DEPRECIATING HER BEAUTY

I love not thy perfections. When I hear
 Thy beauty blazoned, and the common tongue
 Cheapening with vulgar praise a lip, an ear,
 A cheek that I have prayed to ;—when among
 The loud world's gods my god is noised and sung,
 Her wit applauded, even her taste, her dress,
 Her each dear hidden marvel lightly flung
 At the world's feet and stripped to nakedness—
 Then I despise thy beauty utterly,
 Crying, “ Be these your gods, O Israel ! ”
 And I remember that on such a day
 I found thee with eyes bleared and cheeks all pale,
 And lips that trembled to a voiceless cry,
 And that thy bosom in my bosom lay.

VII

ON HER VANITY.

What are these things thou lovest ? Vanity.
 To see men turn their heads when thou dost pass ;
 To be the signboard and the looking-glass
 Where every idler there may glut his eye ;
 To hear men speak thy name mysteriously,
 Wagging their heads. Is it for this, alas,
 That thou hast made a placard of a face
 On which the tears of love were hardly dry ?
 What are these things thou lovest ? The applause
 Of prostitutes at wit which is not thine ;
 The sympathy of shop-boys who would weep
 Their shilling's worth of woe in any cause,
 At any tragedy.—Their tears and mine,
 What difference ? Oh truly tears are cheap !

VIII

AS TO HIS CHOICE OF HER

If I had chosen thee, thou shouldst have been
 A virgin proud, untamed, immaculate,
 Chaste as the morning star, a saint, a queen,
 Scarred by no wars, no violence of hate.
 Thou shouldst have been of soul commensurate
 With thy fair body, brave and virtuous
 And kind and just ; and, if of poor estate,
 At least an honest woman for my house.
 I would have had thee come of honoured blood
 And honourable nurture. Thou shouldst bear
 Sons to my pride and daughters to my heart,
 And men should hold thee happy, wise, and good.
 Lo, thou art none of this, but only fair.
 Yet must I love thee, dear, and as thou art.

IX

ON HER WAYWARDNESS

This is rank slavery. It better were
To till the thankless earth with sweat of brow,
Following dull oxen 'neath a goad of care
To a boor's grave agape behind the plough.
It better were to linger in some slow
Unnatural case, the sport of flood or fire,
To be undone by some inhuman vow
And robbed in youth of youth and its desire.
It better were to perish than thus live
Thy pensioner and bondsman, day by day
Doing fool's service thus for love of thee.
How shall I save thee if thou wilt not grieve
Even for shames like these? How shall I slay
The foes thou lovest, thou, their enemy?

X

ON HER FORGIVENESS OF A WRONG

This is not virtue. To forgive were great
If love were in the issue and not gold.
But wrongs there are 'tis treason to forget,
And to forgive before the deed was cold
Was a strange jest. Ah, Manon, you have sold
The keys of heaven at a vulgar rate,
A sum of money for the wealth untold
'Of a just anger and the right to hate.
—Well. It is done and the price paid. Now make
Haste to betray them as you me betrayed.
These are no longer foes to be forgiven.
Remember they are friends, that peace is made,
That you are theirs. Then rend them for love's sake,
And let your hatred with your love be even.

XI

ON HER LIGHTHEARTEDNESS

I would I had thy courage, dear, to face
This bankruptcy of love, and greet despair
With smiling eyes and unconcerned embrace,
And these few words of banter at "dull care."
I would that I could sing and comb my hair
Like thee the morning thro', and choose my dress,
And gravely argue what I best should wear,
A shade of ribbon or a fold of lace.
I would I had thy courage and thy peace,
Peace passing understanding; that mine eyes
Could find forgetfulness like thine in sleep;
That all the past for me like thee could cease
And leave me cheerfully, sublimely wise,
Like David with washed face who ceased to weep.

XII

ON READING CERTAIN LETTERS

Reading these lines, this record of lost days
Where I am not, and yet where love has been,
This tale of passions consecrate to men
Other than me, unwitting of my ways,
I seem to hear some pagan chaunt of praise
Hymned to an idol shrine in gardens green,
Some wild soft worship of a god obscene,
Some idle homage to an idol face.
I shut my ears, yet hear it still. My eyes
See not, yet see the unchaste the unlawful fire;
I scent the odour of the sacrifice,
And feel the victim's shriek. Then in my ire
I rise up, as on Horeb, and I cry,
"There is none other god, but only I!"

XIII

HE DARES NOT DIE

Four hours by the clock ! How strange it is ! Four hours
Since love and life, the future and the past,
Died with the shutting of these silent doors,
And thought became to me one purpose vast.
I have not moved from where she sat. The cast
Of her fingers on this cushion lightly scores
Its surface still ; and still I hear the last
Tones of her laughter, and here lie her flowers.
Poor flowers ! The ugliness of grief has wrought
Your change already. No besotted bloom
Of a false dawn has lured you to base life.
You at the pinch were brave and trifled not,
Going ungrudging to our common doom.
And I ? Ah God ! I have not faced the knife !

XIV

HE HAS FALLEN FROM THE HEIGHT OF HIS LOVE

Love, how ignobly hast thou met thy doom !
Ill-seasoned scaffolding by which, full-fraught
With passionate youth and mighty hopes, we clomb
To our heart's heaven, fearing, doubting, naught !
Oh love, thou wert too frail for such mad sport,
Too rotten at thy core, designed too high :
And we who trusted thee our death have bought,
And bleeding on the ground must surely die.
—I will not see her. What she now may be
I care not. For the dream within my brain
Is fairer, nobler, and more kind than she ;
And with that vision I can mock at pain.
God ! Was there ever woman half so sweet,
Or death so bitter, or at such dear feet ?

XV

COMPLAINING THAT HE HAD FALLEN AMONG THIEVES

Oh, Lytton, I have gambled with my soul,
And, like a spendthrift, pawned my heritage
To pitiless Jews, and paid a monstrous toll
To knaves and usurers,—and all to wage
Fair war with black-legs, men who dared to gauge
My youth's bright honour as an antique thing,
A broadsword to their fencing point and edge.
So the game went. And even yet I cling
To my mad humour, reckoning up each stake,
Each fair coin lost.—O miserable slaves,
Who for the sake of gold, the poorest thing
Man ever won from the earth's bosom, take
To rope or poison, and who labour not
Even to "dig dishonourable graves,"
See one who has lost a pound for every groat,
For every penny of your squandering !

XVI

HE ARGUES WITH HIS LIFE

My life, what strange mad garments hast thou on,
Now that I see thee truly and am wise !
Thou wild, lost Proteus, strangling and undone !
What shapes are these, what metamorphoses
Of a god's soul in pain ? I hear thy cries
And see thee writhe and take fantastic forms,
And strike in blindness at the destinies
And at thyself, and at thy brother worms.
Ah, foolish worm, thou canst not change thy lot,
And all like thee must perish 'neath the sun.
Why struggle with thy fellows ? Nay, be kind,
Kinder than these. Behold, the flower-pot
Of fate is emptied out, and one by one
The fisher takes you, and his hooks are blind.

XVII

JOY'S TREACHERY

I had a live joy once and pampered her,
For I had brought her from the "golden East,"
To lie when nights were cold upon my breast
And sit beside me the long days and purr,
Until her whole soul should be lapped in fur,
Deep as her claws; a beautiful sleek beast,
Which I might love.—But, when I deemed it least,
Her topaz eyes were on my stomacher,
Athirst for blood. Thus, for I loathed her since
I learned her guile, one night I had her slain
And thrown upon a dunghill to the flies,
Who bred in her fair limbs a pestilence,
Whereof I sickened.—Thus it ever is:
Dead joys unburied breed us death and pain.

XVIII

HE LAMENTS THAT HIS LOVE IS DEAD

My love is dead, dead and in spite of me,—
Dead while I lived,—while yet my blood was rife
With hope and pleasure and the pride of life.
For my love ended unexpectedly
During the Winter, stricken like a tree
By a night's cold, and frozen to the blood,
Whose leaves fell off and never were renewed
By any promise of the years to be.
And, when the Spring came, and the birds, to mate
Among its branches, lo! they found it bare,
Though all around was Summer in the wood.
Yet they took heart awhile, incredulous
That such a tree should be for ever dead.
" 'Tis early yet," they cried. "The Spring is late.
It shall still be as in the days that were."
But Summer came and went while the tree stood
Bare in the sun like a deserted house.
—Then the birds suddenly despaired and fled.

XIX

HE PROTESTS, NOTWITHSTANDING, HIS LOVE
 To be cast forth from the fair light of heaven
 Into the outer darkness and there lie,
 Through unrecorded years of agony,
 Unseen, unheard, unpitied, unforgiven ;
 To be forgotten of the earth and sky,
 Forgotten of the womb that once did bear,
 The eyes that cheered, the voice that comforted,
 The very breast where love had laid his head ;
 To be alone with darkness and despair,
 Alone with endless death, and not to die :
 All these be punishments within the hand
 Of an avenging deity to deal.
 To these I bow in weakness as behoves.
 Yet not in anger but in love I stand
 'Gainst heaven, a new Prometheus, and appeal
 From God to my own soul which ceaseless loves.
 His be the wrath, the burning and the rod.
 Hell shall not make me traitor to my God.

XX

ON FALLING ILL THROUGH GRIEF

Truce to thee, Soul ! I have a debt to pay,
 Which I acknowledge and without thy pleading.
 I like thee little that thou barrest my way
 With prayers too late for one well past thy heeding.
 Truce to these tears ! Thy fellow lieth bleeding,
 Wounded by thee ; and thou, forsooth, dost say,
 " I have a servant who is sick and needing
 Care at men's hands." The care was thine to pay.
 —When this same Soul was sick, a while ago,
 The Body watched her, till his eyes grew dim
 And his cheeks pale for very sympathy,
 Because she grieved. His love has wrought him woe,
 For he is sick and she despiseth him.
 Poor Body, I must take some thought of thee.

XXI

HIS BONDAGE TO MANON IS BROKEN

From this day forth I lead another life,
Another life ! A life without a tear !
To-day has ended the unequal strife ;
My service and my sorrow finish here.
See, my soul cuts her cable of belief
And sails towards the ocean. She shall steer
Sublime henceforth o'er accidents of grief.
Her storm has rolled to a new Hemisphere.
I have loved too much, too loyally, too long.
To-day I am a pirate of the sea.
Let others suffer. I have suffered wrong.
Let others love, and love as tenderly.
Oh, Manon, there are women yet unborn
Shall rue thy frailty, else am I forsworn.

PART II.—JULIET

XXII

ON THE NATURE OF LOVE

You ask my love. What shall my love then be ?
A hope, an aspiration, a desire ?
The soul's eternal charter writ in fire
Upon the earth, the heavens, and the sea ?
You ask my love. The carnal mystery
Of a soft hand, of finger-tips that press,
Of eyes that kindle and of lips that kiss,
Of sweet things known to thee and only thee ?
You ask my love. What love can be more sweet
Than hope or pleasure ? Yet we love in vain.
The soul is more than joy, the life than meat.
The sweetest love of all were love in pain,
And that I will not give. So let it be.
—Nay, give me any love, so it be love of thee.

XXIII

ASKING FOR HER HEART

Give me thy heart, Juliet, give me thy heart !
I have a need of it, an absolute need,
Because my own heart has thus long been dead.
I live but by thy life. The very smart
Of this new pain which has been born of thee
Is thine, thy own great pleasure's counterpart.
I stand before thee naked. Clothe thou me.
Bring out a robe,—thy truth, thy chastity.
Put rings upon my fingers,—honour's meed.
For thou canst give, nor ever reck the cost,
Being the royal creature that thou art,
The fountain of all honour, whose high boast
Is to be greatest when thou givest most.

XXIV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Give me thy soul, Juliet, give me thy soul !
I am a bitter sea, which drinketh in
The sweetness of all waters, and so thine.
Thou, like a river, pure and swift and fall
And freighted with the wealth of many lands,
With hopes, and fears, and death and life, dost roll
Against the troubled ocean of my sin.
Thou doubttest not, though on these desert sands
The billows surge against thee black with brine,
Unwearied. For thy love is fixed and even
And bears thee onward, and thy faith is whole.
Though thou thyself shouldst sin, yet surely Heaven
Hath held thee guiltless and thou art forgiven.

XXV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Give me thy kiss, Juliet, give me thy kiss !
I with my body worship thee and vow
Such service to thy needs as man can do.
I ask no nobler servitude than this.
Am I not thine, the bondsman of thy love,
Whom thou hast bought and ransomed with a price,
And therefore worthy to be ranked above
The very stars that in the heavens move ?
And, Juliet, since I thus am one with you,
And kinglier than Plantagenet or Guelph,
What price were meet for my high mightiness ?
What gold of joy, what hope, what heavenly pelf
Hast thou to give ? Nay, sweetest, give thyself.

XXVI

THE SAME—A CHRISTMAS SONNET

Since thou hast given me these, Juliet, given me these,
There have been tidings told of a great joy,
Of peace on Earth, good-will without annoy.
Thou hast put on my soul's infirmities
And stooped to succour me, and thou hast trod
The way of sorrows with me, on thy knees,
Making thyself a little less than God,
That I might worship him in womanhood,
A new redemption. Therefore, Juliet,
The choirs of Heaven multitudinous
Make all their songs to thee this happy night,
In praise of thy great love incarnate thus,
A very "word made flesh" to dwell with us.

THE LOVE SONNETS

XXVII

ASKING THE FULFILMENT OF HER LOVE

I ask for love who famished am in plenty,
 Not scorning the dear manna of your tears
 But being vexed with that too froward twenty
 Which heads the sum of my rebellious years.
 My soul is fallen "in lust of cucumbers,
 Of fish, of melons," through its long abstaining.
 Unworthy Egypt yet enslaves my fears.
 Ah, love, I thirst, but not for heaven's raining.
 Why speak to me, alas, of heavenly joys
 Who ask for joys of earth these cannot cheat?
 What are these clouds, these pillars of fire to me?
 The wilderness is long. Youth cannot be
 For ever fed on these unnatural toys
 And needs must murmur if it have not meat.

XXVIII

IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION

Why should I hate you, love, or why despise
 For that last proof of tenderness you gave?
 The battle is not always to the brave,
 Nor life's sublimest wisdom to the wise.
 True courage often is in frightened eyes,
 And reason in sweet lips that only rave.
 There is a weakness stronger than the grave,
 And blood poured out has overcome the skies.
 —Nay, love, I honour you the more for this,
 That you have rent the veil, and ushered in
 A fellow soul to your soul's holy place.
 And why should either blush that we have been
 One day in Eden, in our nakedness?
 —'Tis conscience makes us sinners, not our sin.

XXIX

TO HER WHO WOULD COMFORT HIM

I did not ask your pity, dear. Your zeal
I know. It cannot cure me of my woes.
And you, in your sweet happiness, who knows,
Deserve it rather I should pity feel
For what the coming years from you conceal.
I did but cry, thou dear Samaritan,
Out of my bitterness of soul. Each man
Has his own sorrow treading on his heel,
Ready to strike him, and must keep his shield
To his own back. Fate's arrows thickly fly,
And, if they strike not now, will strike at even.
And so I ask no pity. On life's field
The wounded crawl together, but their cry
Is not to one another but to Heaven.

XXX

THE RELIGION OF LOVE

So thou but love me, dear, with thy whole heart
What care I for the rest, for good or ill ?
What for the peace of soul good deeds impart,
What for the tears unholy dreams distil ?
These cannot make my joy, nor shall they kill.
Thou only perfect peace and virtue art
And holiness for me and strength and will,
So thou but love me with a perfect heart.
I ask thee now no longer to be wise ;
No longer to be good, but loving me.
I ask thee nothing now but only this.
Henceforth my Bible, dear, shall be thine eyes,
My beads thy lips, my prayers thy constancy,
My heaven thine arms, eternity thy kiss.

THE LOVE SONNETS

XXXI

TO ONE WHO LOVED HIM

I cannot love you, love, as you love me,
 In singleness of soul, and faith untried :
 I have no faith in any destiny,
 In any Heaven, even at your side.
 Our hearts are all too weak, the world too wide,
 You but a woman. If I dare to give
 Some thought, some tenderness, a little pride,
 A little love, 'tis yours, love, to receive.
 And do not grieve, though now the gift appear
 A drop to your love's ocean. Time shall see.
 —Oh, I could prophesy :—That day is sure,
 Though not perhaps this week, nor month, nor year,
 When your great love shall clean forgotten be,
 And my poor tenderness shall yet endure.
 'Tis not the trees that make the tallest show,
 Which stand out stoutest when the tempests blow.

XXXII

EXHORTING HER TO PATIENCE

Why do we fret at the inconstancy
 Of our frail hearts, which cannot always love ?
 Time rushes onward, and we mortals move
 Like waifs upon a river, neither free
 To halt nor hurry. Sweet, if destiny
 Throws us together for an hour, a day,
 In the back-water of this quiet bay, .
 Let us rejoice. Before us lies the sea,
 Where we must all be lost in spite of love.
 We dare not stop to question. Happiness
 Lies in our hand unsought, a treasure trove.
 Time has short patience of man's vain distress ;
 And fate grows angry at too long delay ;
 And floods rise fast, and we are swept away.

XXXIII

REMINDING HER OF A PROMISE

Oh, Juliet, we have quarrelled with our fate,
And fate has struck us. Wherefore do we cry ?
We prayed for liberty, and now too late
Find liberty is this, to say "good-bye."
The Winter which we loved not has gone by,
And Spring is come. The gardens, which were bare
When we first wandered through them, you and I,
The prisoners of our own vain wishes, are
Now full of golden flowers. The very lane
Down to the sea is green. The cactus hedge
We saw cut down has sprouted new again,
And swallows have their nests on the cliff's edge
Where we so often sat and dared complain
Because our joy was new, and called it pain.

XXXIV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Yes, Spring is come, but joy alas is gone,—
Gone ere we knew it, while our foolish eyes,
Which should have watched its motions every one
Were looking elsewhere, at the hills, the skies,
Chasing vain thoughts, as children butterflies,
Until the hour struck and the day was done,
And we looked up in passionate surprise
To find that clouds had blotted out our sun.
Our joys are gone. And what is left to us,
Who loved not even love when it was here ?
What but a voice which sobs monotonous
As these sad waves upon the rocks, the dear
Fond voice which once made music with our own,
And which our hearts now ache to think upon.

XXXV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Old memories are sweet, but these are new
And smart like wounds yet green. But one there is
Which, for the cause that it was dear to you
In days which counted upon greater bliss,
Is fairer now and dearer far than these ;
And this the memory is of some hours spent
One afternoon when, seated at your knees,
I made narration (it was middle Lent
And you with Judas flowers had filled your lap),
Of the wise secret of these rhymes of mine,
And gave a promise, which behold I keep,
To write them out for you, each idle line,
Throwing you all my rubbish in one heap.
Poor stuff perhaps. And yet it made you weep.

XXXVI

FEAR HAS CAST OUT LOVE

'Tis not that love is less or sorrow more
Than in the days when first these things began.
Even then you doubted, and our hearts were sore
And you rebelled because I was a man.
Even then you fought and wrestled with my plan
Of earthly bliss. What bitter anguish too
When at the hour decreed our passion ran
Out of our keeping and love claimed its due !
'Tis not love's fault we part, or grief's. Alas,
One mightier now compels us with His nod.
The fire of Heaven has touched us, and we pass
From pleasure's chastenings to a fiercer rod ;
And fear has cast out love, for flesh is grass
And we are withered with the wrath of God.

XXXVII

TO ONE WHO WOULD "REMAIN FRIENDS"

What is this prate of friendship ? Kings discrow'ed
Go forth, not citizens but outlawed men.
If love has ceased to give a loyal sound,
Let there at least be silence. Once again
I go, proscribed, exiled, dominionless
Out of your coasts, yet scorning to complain.
I grudge not your allegiance nor my bliss,
I yield the pleasure as I keep the pain.
Rebellion's rights are limited though strong.
The right to take gives not the right to give.
Mine were the sole right and prerogative
To give a title or forgive a wrong.
This gift of friendship was not yours to bring.
As I have lived in love I still will live
Or die, if needs must, and without reprieve,
Your lover yet, and kingdomless a king.

XXXVIII

TO ONE NOW ESTRANGED

Why did you love me ? Was it not enough
That the world loved you, all the world and I ?
Or was your heart of so sublime a stuff
That it might trifle with inconstancy
And love and cease to love and yet not die ?
Heaven was your throne by right of happiness
And Earth your footstool. All things great and high
Waited your bidding, love itself no less.
Yet, if you deigned to love, if from your place
In Heaven you stooped, if, when your heart was moved,
A thrill of human pleasure tinged your face,
If 'twas in weakness not in strength you loved,
Then there was cause to blush. Yet, loving, how
Shall you blush less to be apostate now ?

XXXIX

FAREWELL TO JULIET

Juliet, farewell. I would not be forgiven
Even if I forgave. These words must be
The last between us two in Earth or Heaven,
The last and bitterest. You are henceforth free
For ever from my bitter words and me.
You shall not at my hand be further vexed
With either love, reproach or jealousy
(So help me Heaven), in this world or the next.
Our souls are single for all time to come
And for eternity, and this farewell
Is as the trumpet note, the crack of doom,
Which heralds an eternal silence. Hell
Has no more fixed and absolute decree.
And Heaven and Hell may meet,—yet never we.

XL.

THE SAME CONTINUED

'Tis strange we are thus parted, not by death
Or man's device, but by our own mad will,
We who have stood together on life's path
Through half a youth of good repute and ill,
Friends more than lovers. See, Love's citadel
We held so stoutly 'gainst a world in arms
Lies all dismantled now, a sight to fill
The Earth with lamentations and alarms.
Whose was the fault? I dare not ask nor say.
If there was treachery, 'tis best untold.
The price of treason we receive to-day
Is paid to both of us in evil gold.
Ay, take thy bitter freedom. 'Tis the fee
Of love betrayed and faith's apostasy.

XLI

THE SAME CONTINUED

We may not meet. I could not for pride's sake
Dissemble further, and I suffer pain,
A palpable distinct and physical ache,
When our eyes meet by accident, and when
I hear you talk in your pathetic strain
Which always moved me. Only yesterday,
As I was standing with a crowd of men
In the long corridor, you came my way
And chanced to stop, and thus by chance I heard
A score of phrases uttered in that sad
Half-suppliant voice which once my spirit stirred
To its foundations. Yet your theme was glad—
Strangers your hearers. What was in these spells
To move me still ? A trick, and nothing else !

XLII

THE SAME CONTINUED

We vex each other with our presence, I
By my regrets and by my mocking face,
You by your laughter and mad gaiety,
And both by cruel thoughts of happier days.
Is then the world so narrow that we pace
These streets like prisoners still with eyes askance,
As bound together in the fell embrace
Of a dark chain which bars deliverance ?
Nay, go your ways. I will not vex you more.
Make your own terms with life, while you are fair.
There is none better learned in woman's lore.
You yet may take revenge on grief and care,
And 'twas your nature ever to be gay,
Why should I scoff ? Be merry while you may.

XLIII

THE SAME CONTINUED

I do not love you. To have said this once
Had seemed to both of us a monstrous lie,
An idle boast, love's last extravagance
Or the mere paradox of vanity.
Now it is true and yet more hideously
More strangely monstrous. I, no less than you,
Here own at length the worm which cannot die,
The burden of a pain for ever new.
This is the " pang of loss," the bitterest
Which Hell can give. We are shut out from Heaven
And never more shall look upon Love's face,
Being with those who perish unforgiven.
Never to see Love's face ! Ah, pain in pain,
Which we do well to weep and weep again !

XLIV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Yet we shall live without love, as some live
Without their limbs, their senses, maimed or deaf.
We even shall forget love, and shall thrive
And prosper and grow fat upon our grief.
You are consoled already more than half,
And wear your sorrow lightly. I will boast
No longer the refusal of relief
Than as a decent mourner of hopes crossed.
We yet shall laugh, and laughter is more loud
When following tears. The men who drive a hearse
Are not the least lighthearted of the crowd.
See, we have made love's epitaph in verse
And fairly buried him. God's ways are best.
Then home to pleasure and the funeral feast.

XLV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Do you remember how I laughed at you
In the Beaulieu woods, and how I made my peace ?
It was your thirtieth birthday, and you threw
Stones like a school-girl at the chestnut trees.
The heavens were light above us and the breeze.
Your Corydon and all the merry crew
Had wandered to a distance, busier bees
Than we, who cared not where the hazels grew.
We were alone at last. I had been teasing
You with the burden of years left behind.
You were too fair to find my wit displeasing,
And I too tender to be less than kind.
Your pebbles struck me. "Wretch," I cried. The word
Entered our hearts that instant like a sword.

XLVI

THE SAME CONTINUED

Thrice happy fools ! What wisdom shall we learn
In this world or the next, if next there be,
More deep, more full, more worthy our concern
Than that first word of folly taught us ? We
Had suddenly grown silent. I could see
Your cheek had lost a little of its hue,
And your lips trembled, and beseechingly
Your blue eyes turned to mine, and well I knew
Your woman's instinct had divined my speech,
The meaning of a word so lightly spoken.
The word was a confession, clear to each,
A pledge as plain and as distinct a token
As that of Peter at his master's knees,
"Thou knowest that I love thee more than these."

XLVII

THE SAME CONTINUED

I see you, Juliet, still, with your straw hat
Loaded with vines and with your dear pale face,
On which those thirty years so lightly sat,
And the white outline of your muslin dress.
You wore a little *fichu* trimmed with lace
And crossed in front, as was the fashion then,
Bound at your waist with a broad band or sash,
All white and fresh and virginally plain.
There was a sound of shouting far away
Down in the valley, as they called to us,
And you, with hands clasped seeming still to pray
Patience of fate, stood listening to me thus
With heaving bosom. There a rose lay curled.
It was the reddest rose in all the world.

XLVIII

THE SAME CONTINUED

I think there never was a dearer woman,
A better, kinder, truer than you were,
A gentler spirit more divinely human
Than yours with your sweet melancholy air
Of tender gaiety, which seemed like care,
And in your voice a sob as of distress
At the world's ways, its sin and its despair,
Being yourself all strange to wickedness.
Now you are neither gentle, kind, nor good,
And you have sorrows of your own to grieve,
And in your mirth compassion has no mood ;
You wear no more your heart upon your sleeve,
And if your voice still sobs 'tis with a sense
Of sorrow's power, grief's wealth, experience.

XLIX

THE SAME CONTINUED

A "woman with a past." What happier omen
Could heart desire for mistress, or for friend ?
Phoenix of friends, and most divine of women,
Skilled in all fence to venture or defend
And with love's science at your fingers' end,
No tears to vex, no ignorance to bore,
A fancy ripe, the zest which sorrows lend !—
I would to God we had not met before !
—I would to God ! and yet to God I would
That we had never met. To see you thus
Is grief and wounds and poison to my blood.
Oh, this is sacrilege and foul abuse.
You were a thing for honour not vile use,
Not for the mad world's wicked sinks and stews.

THE SAME CONTINUED

What have I done ? What gross impiety
Prompted my hand thus against God and good ?
Was there not joy on Earth enough for me
That I must scale the Heaven where you stood,
And with my sinful blood pollute your blood ?
You were the type of wise sweet sanctity,
Of that unearthly half of womanhood
Which well redeems the rest. Oh, Juliet, we
Sinned in a temple, and our tears to-day
Appeal in vain to Heaven which dares not hear.
God is not always mocked. And thus we pay
Our uttermost debt unheeded, tear on tear
And scoff on scoff and sin heaped up on sin,
While there is justice on the Earth to men.

THE LOVE SONNETS

LI

THE SAME CONTINUED

We planted love, and lo it bred a brood
Of lusts and vanities and senseless joys.
We planted love, and you have gathered food
Of every bitter herb which fills and cloy.
Your meat is loud excitement and mad noise,
Your wine the unblest ambition of command
O'er hearts of men, of dotards, idiots, boys.
These are the playthings fitted to your hand,
These are your happiness. You weep no more,
But I must weep. My Heaven has been defiled.
My sin has found me out and smites me sore,
And folly, justified of her own child,
Rules all the empire where love reigned of yore,
Folly red-cheeked but rotten to the core.

LII.

THE SAME CONTINUED

Lame, impotent conclusion to youth's dreams
Vast as all heaven ! See, what glory lies
Entangled here in these base stratagems,
What virtue done to death ! O glorious sighs,
Sublime beseechings, high cajoleries,
Fond wraths, brave ruptures, all that sometime was
Our daily bread of gods beneath the skies,
How are ye ended, in what utter loss !
Time was, time is, and time is yet to come,
Till even time itself shall have its end.
These were eternal. And behold, a tomb !
Come, let us laugh and eat and drink. God send
What all the world must need one day as we,
Speedy oblivion, rest for memory.

LIII

THE SAME CONTINUED

Farewell, then. It is finished. I forgo
With this all right in you, even that of tears.
If I have spoken hardly, it will show
How much I loved you. With you disappears
A glory, a romance of many years.
What you may be henceforth I will not know.
The phantom of your presence on my fears
Is impotent at length for weal or woe.
Your past, your present, all alike must fade
In a new land of dreams where love is not.
Then kiss me and farewell. The choice is made
And we shall live to see the past forgot,
If not forgiven. See, I came to curse,
Yet stay to bless. I know not which is worse.

PART III.—GODS AND FALSE GODS

LIV

HE DESIRES THE IMPOSSIBLE

If it were possible the fierce sun should,
 Standing in heaven unloved, companionless,
 Enshrined be in some white-bosomed cloud,
 And so forget his rage and loneliness ;
 If it were possible the bitter seas
 Should suddenly grow sweet, till at their brink
 Birds with bright eyes should stoop athirst and drink ;
 —If these were possible ; and if to these
 It should be proved that love has sometimes been
 'Twixt lambs and leopards, doves and hawks, that snow
 Clasps the bare rocks, that rugged oaks grow green
 In the west wind, that pinkest blossoms blow
 Upon May's blackest thorn ;—then, only then,
 I might believe that love between us two
 Was still in heaven's gift, sweet child.—And you ?

LV

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

To-day, all day, I rode upon the Down,
 With hounds and horsemen, a brave company.
 On this side in its glory lay the sea,
 On that the Sussex Weald, a sea of browr.
 The wind was light, and brightly the sun shone,
 And still we galloped on from gorse to gorse.
 And once, when checked, a thrush sang, and my horse
 Pricked his quick ears as to a sound unknown.
 I knew the Spring was come. I knew it even
 Better than all by this, that through my chase
 In bush and stone and hill and sea and heaven
 I seemed to see and follow still your face.
 Your face my quarry was. For I I rode,
 My horse a thing of wings, myself a god.

LVI

TO ONE WHOM HE DARED NOT LOVE

As one who, in a desert wandering
Alone and faint beneath a pitiless sky,
And doubting in his heart if he shall bring
His bones back to his kindred or there die,
Finds at his feet a treasure suddenly
Such as would make him for all time a king,
And so forgets his fears and with keen eye
Falls to a-counting each new precious thing :
—So was I when you told me yesterday
The tale of your dear love. Awhile I stood
Astonished and enraptured, and my heart
Began to count its treasures. Now dismay
Steals back my joy, and terror chills my blood,
And I remember only “ We must part.”

LVII

ON A LOST OPPORTUNITY

We might, if you had willed, have conquered Heaven.
Once only in our lives before the gate
Of Paradise we stood, one fortunate even,
And gazed in sudden rapture through the grate.
And, while you stood astonished, I, our fate
Venturing, pushed the latch and found it free.
There stood the tree of knowledge fair and great
Beside the tree of life. One instant we
Stood in that happy garden, guardianless.
My hands already turned towards the tree
And in another moment we had known
The taste of joy and immortality
And been ourselves as gods. But in distress
You thrust me back with supplicating arms
And eyes of terror, till the impatient sun
Had time to set and till the heavenly host
Rushed forth on us with clarions and alarms
And cast us out for ever, blind and lost.

THE LOVE SONNETS

LVIII

TO ONE ON HER WASTE OF TIME

Why practise, love, this small economy
Of your heart's favours ? Can you keep a kiss
To be enjoyed in age ? And would the free
Expense of pleasure leave you penniless ?
Nay, nay. Be wise. Believe me, pleasure is
A gambler's token, only gold to-day.
The day of love is short, and every bliss
Untasted now is a bliss thrown away.
'Twere pitiful, in truth, such treasures should
Lie by like miser's crusts till mouldy grown.
Think you the hand of age will be less rude
In touching your sweet bosom than my own ?
Alas, what matter, when our heads are grey,
Whether you loved or did not love to-day ?

LIX

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

How loud the storm blew all that bitter night !
The loosened ivy tapping on the pane
Woke me and woke, again and yet again,
Till I was full awake and sat upright.
I listened to the noises of the night,
And presently I heard, disguised yet plain,
A footstep on the stair which mounted light
Towards me, and my heart outbeat the rain.
I knew that it was you. I knew it even
Before the door, which by design ajar
Waited your coming, had disclosed my fate.
I felt a wind upon my face from heaven.
I felt the presence of a life. My hair
Was touched as by a spirit. Insensate
I drew you to my bosom. Ah, too late !
I clutched the darkness. There was nothing there.

LX

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

Ah Love, dear Love. In vain I scoff. In vain
 I ply my barren wit, and jest at thee.
 Thou heedest not, or dost forgive the pain,
 And in thy own good time and thy own way,
 Waiting my silence, thou dost vanquish me.
 Thou comest at thy will in sun or rain
 And at the hour appointed, a Spring day,
 An Autumn night—and lo, I serve again.
 Forgive me, touch me, chide me. What to thee,
 God that thou art, are these vain shifts of mine ?
 Let me but know thee. Thou alone art wise.
 I ask not to be wise or great or free
 Or aught but at thy knees and wholly thine,
 Thus, and to feel thy hand upon mine eyes.

LXI

TO ONE EXCUSING HIS POVERTY

Ah ! love, impute it not to me a sin
 That my poor soul thus beggared comes to thee.
 My soul a pilgrim was, in search of thine,
 And met these accidents by land and sea.
 The world was hard, and took its usury,
 Its toll for each new night in each new inn ;
 And every road had robber bands to fee ;
 And all, even kindness, must be paid in coin.
 Behold my scrip is empty, my heart bare.
 I give thee nothing who my all would give.
 My pilgrimage is finished, and I fare
 Bare to my death, unless with thee I live.
 Ah ! give, love, and forgive that I am poor.
 Ah ! take me to thy arms and ask no more.

LXII

TO ONE WHO WOULD MAKE A CONFESSION

Oh ! leave the Past to bury its own dead.
 The Past is naught to us, the Present all.
 What need of last year's leaves to strew Love's bed ?
 What need of ghosts to grace a festival ?
 I would not, if I could, those days recall,
 Those days not ours. For us the feast is spread,
 The lamps are lit, and music plays withal.
 Then let us love and leave the rest unsaid.
 This island is our home. Around it roar
 Great gulfs and oceans, channels, straits, and seas.
 What matter in what wreck we reached the shore,
 So we both reached it ? We can mock at these.
 Oh ! leave the Past, if Past indeed there be.
 I would not know it. I would know but thee.

LXIII

THE ⁹PLEASURES OF LOVE

I do not care for kisses. 'Tis a debt
 We paid for the first privilege of love.
 These are the rains of April which have wet
 Our fallow hearts and forced their germs to move.
 Now the green corn has sprouted. Each new day
 Brings better pleasures, a more dear surprise,
 The blade, the ear, the harvest—and our way
 Leads through a region wealthy grown and wise.
 We now compare our fortunes. Each his store
 Displays to kindred eyes of garnered grain,
 Two happy farmers, learned in love's lore,
 Who weigh and touch and argue and complain.
 Dear endless argument ! Yet sometimes we
 Even as we argue kiss. There ! Let it be.

LXIV

HE APPEALS AGAINST HIS BOND

In my distress Love made me sign a bond,
A cruel bond. 'Twas by necessity
Wrung from a foolish heart, alas, too fond,
Too blindly fond, its error to foresee.
And now my soul's estate, in jeopardy,
Lies to a pledge it never can redeem.
Love's loan was love, one hour of ecstasy,
His penalty eternal loss of him.
—See, I am penniless, the forfeit paid,
And go a beggar forth from thy dear sight,
My pound of more than flesh too strictly weighed
And cut too near the heart. Fair Israelite,
Thy plea was just. Thy right has been confessed.
And yet a work of mercy were twice blessed.

LXV

TO ONE WHO SPOKE ILL OF HIM

What is your quarrel with me, in love's name,
Fair queen of wrath? What evil have I done,
What treason to the thought of our dear shame
Subscribed or plotted? Is my heart less one
In its obedience to your stern decrees
Than on the day when first you said "I please,"
And with your lips ordained our union?
Am I not now, as then, upon my knees?
You bade me love you, and the deed was done,
And when you cried "Enough" I stopped, and when
You bade me go I went, and when you said
"Forget me" I forgot. Alas, what wrong
Would you avenge upon a loyal head,
Which ever bowed to you in joy and pain,
That you thus scourge me with your pitiless tongue?

LXVI

THE THREE AGES OF WOMAN

Love, in thy youth, a stranger, knelt to thee,
With cheeks all red and golden locks all curled,
And cried, "Sweet child, if thou wilt worship me,
Thou shalt possess the kingdoms of the world."
But you looked down and said, "I know you not,
Nor want I other kingdom than my soul."
Till Love in shame, convicted of his plot,
Left you and turned him to some other goal.
And this discomfiture which you had seen
Long served you for your homily and boast,
While, of your beauty and yourself the queen,
You lived a monument of vain love crossed,
With scarce a thought of that which might have been
To scare you with the ghost of pleasures lost.

LXVII

THE SAME CONTINUED

Your youth flowed on, a river chaste and fair,
Till thirty years were written to your name.
A wife, a mother, these the titles were
Which conquered for you the world's fairest fame.
In all things you were wise but in this one,
That of your wisdom you yourself did doubt.
Youth spent like age, no joy beneath the sun.
Your glass of beauty vainly running out.
Then suddenly again, ere well you knew,
Love looked upon you tenderly, yet sad :
"Are these wise follies, then, enough for you ?"
He said ;—"Love's wisdom were itself less mad."
And you : "What wouldst thou of me ?" "My bare due,
In token of what joys may yet be had."

LXVIII

THE SAME CONTINUED

Again Love left you. With appealing eyes
You watched him go, and lips apart to speak.
He left you, and once more the sun did rise
And the sun set, and week trod close on week
And month on month, till you had reached the goal
Of forty years, and life's full waters grew
To bitterness and flooded all your soul,
Making you loathe old things and pine for new.
And you into the wilderness had fled,
And in your desolation loud did cry,
"Oh for a hand to turn these stones to bread!"
Then in your ear Love whispered scornfully,
"Thou too, poor fool, thou, even thou," he said,
"Shalt taste thy little honey ere thou die."

LXIX

SIBYLLINE BOOKS

When first, a boy, at your fair knees I kneeled,
'Twas with a worthy offering. In my hand
My young life's book I held, a volume sealed,
Which none but you, I deemed, might understand.
And you I did entreat to loose the band
And read therein your own soul's destiny.
~~But~~, farquhar-like, you turned from my demand,
'Too proudly fair to find your fate in me.
When now I come, alas, what hands have turned
Those virgin pages! Some are torn away,
And some defaced, and some with passion burned,
And some besmeared with life's least holy clay.
Say, shall I offer you these pages wet
With blood and tears? And will your sorrow read
What your joy heeded not?—Unopened yet
One page remains. It still may hold a fate,
A counsel for the day of utter need.
Nay, speak, sad heart, speak quick. The hour is late.
Age threatens us. The Gaul is at the gate.

LXX

ON READING THE MEMOIRS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN

Why was I born in this degenerate age ?
 Or rather why, a thousand times, with soul
 Of such degenerate stuff that a mute rage
 Is all its reason, tears the only toll
 It takes on life, and impotence its goal ?
 Why was I born to this sad heritage
 Of fierce desires which cannot fate control,
 Of idle hopes life never can assuage ?
 Why was I born thus weak ?—Oh to have been
 A merry fool, at jest with destiny ;
 A free hand ready and a heart as free ;
 A ruffler in the camps of Mazarin !
 Oh for the honest soul of d'Artagnan,
 Twice happy knave, a Gascon and a man !

LXXI

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN

I long have had a quarrel set with Time,
 Because he robbed me. Every day of life
 Was wrested from me after bitter strife,
 I never yet could see the sun go down
 But I was angry in my heart, nor hear
 The leaves fall in the wind without a tear
 Over the dying summer. I have known
 No truce with Time nor, Time's accomplice, Death.
 The fair world is the witness of a crime
 Repeated every hour. For life and breath
 Are sweet to all who live ; and bitterly
 The voices of these robbers of the heath
 Sound in each ear and chill the passer by.
 —What have we done to thee, thou monstrous Time ?
 What have we done to Death that we must die ?

LXXII

FROM THE FRENCH OF ANVERS

My heart has its secret, my soul its mystery,
A love which is eternal begotten in a day.
The ill is long past healing. Why should I speak to-day?
For none have ears to hear, and, least of all, she.
Alas I shall have lived unseen tho' ever near,
For ever at her side, for ever too alone.
I shall have lived my life unknowing and unknown,
Asking naught, daring naught, receiving naught from her.
And she, whom Heaven made kind and chaste and fair,
Shall go undoubting on, the while upon her way
The murmur of my love shall fill the land,
Till, reading here perchance severe and unaware
These lines so full of her, she shall look up and say
"Who was this woman then?" and shall not understand.

LXXIII

TO ONE TO WHOM HE HAD BEEN UNJUST

If I was angry once that you refused
The bread I asked and offered me a stone,
Deeming the rights of bounty thus abused
And my poor beggary but trampled on,
Believe me now I would that wrong atone
With such submission as a heart can show,
Asking no bread of life but that alone
Your dear heart proffered and my pride let go.
Give me your help, your pity, what you will,
Your pardon for a sin, your act of grace
For a rebellion vanquished and undone,
The stone I once refused, that precious stone
Your friendship, so my thoughts may serve you still
Even if I never more behold your face.

LXXIV

THE MOCKERY OF LIFE

God ! What a mockery is this life of ours !
Cast forth in blood and pain from our mother's womb,
Most like an excrement, and weeping showers
Of senseless tears : unreasoning, naked, dumb,
The symbol of all weakness and the sum :
Our very life a sufferance.—Presently,
Grown stronger, we must fight for standing-room
Upon the earth, and the bare liberty
To breathe and move. We crave the right to toil.
We push, we strive, we jostle with the rest.
We learn new courage, stifle our old fears,
Stand with stiff backs, take part in every broil.
It may be that we love, that we are blest.
It may be, for a little space of years,
We conquer fate and half forget our tears.

LXXV

THE SAME^d CONTINUED

And then fate strikes us. First our joys decay.
Youth, with its pleasures, is a tale soon told.
We grow a little poorer day by day.
Old friendships falter. Loves grow strangely cold.
In vain we shift our hearts to a new hold
And barter joy for joy, the less for less.
We doubt our strength, our wisdom, and our gold.
We stand alone, as in a wilderness
Of doubts and terrors. Then, if we be wise,
We make our terms with fate and, while we may,
Sell our life's last sad remnant for a hope.
And it is wisdom thus to close our eyes.
But for the foolish, those who cannot pray,
What else remains of their dark horoscope
But a tall tree and courage and a rope ?

LXXVI

THE SAME CONTINUED

And who shall tell what ignominy death
Has yet in store for us ; what abject fears
Even for the best of us ; what fights for breath ;
What sobs, what supplications, what wild tears ;
What impotence of soul against despairs
Which blot out reason ?—The last trembling thought
Of each poor brain, as dissolution nears,
Is not of fair life lost, of Heaven bought
And glory won. 'Tis not the thought of grief ;
Of friends deserted ; loving hearts which bleed ;
Wives, sisters, children who around us weep.
But only a mad clutching for relief
From physical pain, importunate Nature's need ;
The search as for a womb where we may creep
Back from the world, to hide,—perhaps to sleep.

LXXVII

WHO WOULD LIVE AGAIN ?

Oh who would live again to suffer loss ?
Once in my youth I battled with my fate,
Grudging my days to death. I would have won
A place by violence beneath the sun.
I took my pleasures madly as by force,
Even the air of heaven was a prize.
I stood a plunderer at death's very gate,
And all the lands of life I did o'errun
With sack and pillage. Then I scorned to die,
Save as a conqueror. The treasures
Of love I ransacked ; pity, pride and hate.
All that can make hearts beat or brim men's eyes
With living tears I took as robes to wear.
—But see, now time has struck me on the hip.
I cannot hate nor love. My senses are
Struck silent with the silence of my lip.
No courage kindles in my heart to dare,
No strength to do. The world's last phantoms slip
Out of my grasp, and naught is left but pain.
Love, life, vain strength !—Oh, who would live again ?

LXXVIII

COLD COMFORT

There is no comfort underneath the sun.
Youth turns to age ; riches are quickly spent ;
Pride breeds us pain, our pleasures punishment.
The very courage which we count upon
A single night of fever shall break down,
And love is slain by fear. Death last of all
Spreads out his nets and watches for our fall.
There is no comfort underneath the sun !
—When thou art old, O man, if thou wert proud
Be humble ; pride will here avail thee not.
There is no courage which can conquer death.
Forget that thou wert wise. Nay, keep thy breath
For prayer, that so thy wisdom be forgot
And thou perhaps get pity of thy God.

LXXIX

AMOUR OBLIGE

I could forgive you, dearest, all the folly
Your heart has dreamed. Alas, as we grow old,
We need more vigorous cures for melancholy,
A stronger nutriment for hearts grown cold.
We need in face of weakness to be bold.
We need our folly to keep fate at bay.
Oh, we need madness, in the manifold
Doubts and despairs which herald our decay.
I could forgive you all and more than all.
Yet, dearest, though for us fate waves his hand
And we accept it as the common lot
To meet no more at this life's festival,
It were unseemly you should take your stand,
Now my heart's citadel is laid in siege,
In open field with those who love me not.
Love has a rank which surely should oblige.

LXXX

TO ONE UNFORGOTTEN

You are not *false* perhaps, as lovers say
Meaning the act,—Alas, that guilt was mine.
Nor, maybe, have you bowed at other shrine
Than the true god's where first you learned to pray.
I know the idols round you. They are clay,
Mere Dagon's to the courage half divine
Which bears you scathless still thro' sap and mine
And breach and storm upon your virgin way.
Alas, I know your virtue. But your heart,
How have you treated it ? I sometimes see,
When nights are long, a vision chaste and true
Of pale pathetic eyes which gaze on me
In love and grief eternal. Then I start,
Crying aloud, and reach my arms to you.

LXXXI

TO ONE WHOM HE HAD LOVED TOO LONG

Why do I cling to thee, sad love ? Too long
Thou bringest me neither pleasure to my soul
Nor profit to my reason save in song,
My daily utterance. See, thy beggar's dole
Of foolish tears cannot my tears cajole ;
Thy laughter doth my laughter grievous wrong ;
Thy anger angereth me ; thou heapest coal
Of fire upon my head the drear night long
With thy forgiveness. What is this thou wilt ?
Mine ears have ceased to hear, my tongue to speak,
And naught is left for my spent heart to do.
Love long has left the feast ; the cup is spilt.
Let us go too. The dawn begins to break,
And there is mockery in this heaven of blue.

LXXXII

HE WOULD LEAD A BETTER LIFE

I am tired of folly, tired of my own ways,
Love is a strife. I do not want to strive.
If I had foes I now would make my peace.
If I less wedded were I now would wive.
I would do service to my kind, contrive
Something of good for men, some happiness
For those who in the world still love and live,
And, as my fathers did, so end my days.
I would earn praise, I too, of honest men.
I would repent in sackcloth if needs be.
I would serve God and expiate my sin,
Abjuring love and thee—ay, even thee.
I would do this, dear love. But what am I
To will or do ? As we have lived we die.

PART IV.—VITA NOVA

LXXXIII

A DAY IN SUSSEX

The dove did lend me wings. I fled away
From the loud world which long had troubled me.
Oh lightly did I flee when hoyden May
Threw her wild mantle on the hawthorn tree.
I left the dusty high road, and my way
Was through deep meadows, shut with copses fair.
A choir of thrushes poured its roundelay
From every hedge and every thicket there.
Mild, moon-faced kine looked on, where in the grass
All heaped with flowers I lay, from noon till eve.
And hares unwitting close to me did pass,
And still the birds sang, and I could not grieve.
Oh what a blessed thing that evening was !
Peace, music, twilight, all that could deceive
A soul to joy or lull a heart to peace.
It glimmers yet across whole years like these.

LXXXIV

IN ANNIVERSARIO MORTIS

If I can bring no tribute of fresh tears
To mingle with the dust which covers thee ;
If in this latest dawn of evil years
My rebel eyes withhold their sympathy ;
If of a truth my thoughts so barren be
Of their old griefs, so numb to tenderness
That they nor hear nor taste nor feel nor see
The sweetness of thy presence in this place ;
If I now drowse,—'tis that the flesh is weak
More than the spirit. See, by thy dear bed
Once more I kneel in sorrow and in love.
See, I still watch by thee if thou shouldst move,
If thou shouldst raise thy hand or turn thy head,
Or speak my name. And yet thou dost not speak.

LXXXV

THE SAME CONTINUED

These flowers shall be my offering, living flowers
Which here shall die with you in sacrifice,
Flowers from the empty fields which once were yours
And now are mine. No gold, nor myrrh, nor spice,
~~For~~ any dead man's offering may suffice.
I love not flowers : but thus to deck a grave
Which has no need of things of greater price.
Life is the only tribute death would have.
—Ah, thou art dead. Mine is this fair domain
With all its living beauty and brave shows
Of lawn, and lake, and garden ; mine the increase
Of the year's harvest, the slow growth of trees,
And that fair natural wealth we loved in vain,
Flowers, which shall never more adorn my house.

LXXXVI

THE SAME CONTINUED

It is not true the dead unhonoured were
If they returned to life. Nay, claim thine own,
And see how gladly I, thy "thankless heir,"
Will yield thee back possession of thy throne.
I am not so in love with riches grown
That such can comfort me. Alas, too long
The fields are furrowed and the wheat is sown
For my sole grief that these should do thee wrong.
I hold these things not wholly as in fee,
But thinking that perhaps some happy day
We yet may walk together, and devise
Of the old lands we loved, in Paradise,
And I shall give account, as best I may,
How I thy tenant was awhile for thee.

LXXXVII

THE SAME CONTINUED

Thy ways were not my ways. Thy life was peace,
And mine has been a battle. Thou didst store
Thy soul's wealth sternly to a sure increase,
And thy revenue's much still swelled to more.
Thou squanderedst nothing on the pomp of war;
The lust of glory. No mad covetous eyes
Were thine upon thy neighbour's lands afar,
His wealth, his wife, his fenceless vanities.
Thou wert a brave, just man, whom all men knew
And trusted, and some loved, and thou to me
Wert as a tower of strength, a sanctuary
To which I fled from the world's maddened crew,
Wounded by me, and there with bloodstained hands
Clung to the altar of thy innocence.

LXXXVIII

THE SAME CONTINUED

There were two with thee in thine agony,
I and another. In that hour supreme
We stood beside thy cross and gazed at thee,
Waiting till death should wake thee from thy dream.
Thy hands held both our hands and clung to them
And drew them to each other. We could see
Thy dumb lips open as to either name
And thy eyes turn to our eyes wistfully.
O eloquent eyes ! Ye were not closed in vain.
Still from the grave ye speak, " Behold a son,
Behold a mother." From that rite of pain
We two went home together bone of bone
And flesh of flesh, distinguished among men,
Thy witnesses till death shall come again.

LXXXIX

THE LIMIT OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

There is a vice in the world's reasoning. Man
Has conquered knowledge. He has conquered power ;
He has traced out the universal plan
Of the Earth's being ; and in this last hour
He has unmade the God which he had made.
I cannot doubt but he at length has read
The riddle of the Earth ; that he is wise.
He also hath dominion chartered
Over the lands, the oceans, and the skies,
Which toil and sweat to give him daily bread.
—Knowledge he hath, and power upon the Earth,
And long ago he had himself been God,
But for the cruel secret of his birth,
Which gave him kindred with the dust he trod,
And for the hideous ending of his mirth,
A fly-blown carrion festering 'neath the sod.

XC

THE PRIDE OF UNBELIEF

When I complained that I had lost my hope
Of life eternal with the eternal God ;
When I refused to read my horoscope
In the unchanging stars, or claim abode
With powers and dominations, but, poor clod,
Clung to the earth and grovelled in my tears,
Because I soon must lie beneath the sod
And close the little number of my years,—
Then I was told that pride had barred the way,
And raised this foul rebellion in my head.
Yet, strange rebellion ! I, but yesterday,
Was God's own son in His own likeness bred.
And thrice strange pride ! who thus am cast away
And go forth lost and disinherited.

XCI

LAUGHTER AND DEATH

There is no laughter in the natural world
Of beast or fish or bird, though no sad doubt
Of their futurity to them unfurled
Has dared to check the mirth-compelling shout.
The lion roars his solemn thunder out
To the sleeping woods. The eagle screams her cry.
Even the lark must strain a serious throat
To hurl his blest defiance at the sky.
Fear, anger, jealousy have found a voice.
Love's pain or rapture the brute bosoms swell.
Nature has symbols for her nobler joys,
Her nobler sorrows. Who had dared foretell
That only man, by some sad mockery,
Should learn to laugh who learns that he must die ?

XCII

WRITTEN IN DISTRESS

We sometimes sit in darkness. I long while
Have sat there, in a shadow as of death.
My friends and comforters no longer smile,
And they who grudge me wrongfully my breath,
Are strong and many. I am bowed beneath
A weight of trouble and unjust reproach
From many fools and friends of little faith.
The world is little worth, yet troubles much.
But I am comforted in this, that I,
Although my face is darkened to men's eyes
And all my life eclipsed with angry wars,
Now see things hidden ; and I seem to spy
New worlds above my heaven. Night is wise
And joy a sun which never guessed the stars.

XCIII

A DISAPPOINTMENT

Spring, of a sudden, came to life one day.
Ere this, the Winter had been cold and chill.
That morning first the Summer air did fill
The world, making bleak March seem almost May.
The daffodils were blooming golden gay ;
The birch trees budded purple on the hill ;
The rose, that clambered up the window-sill,
Put forth a crimson shoot. All yesterday
The winds about the casement chilly blew,
But now the breeze that played before the door
So caught the dead leaves that I thought there flew
Brown butterflies up from the grassy floor.
—But someone said you came not. Ah, too true !
And I, I thought that Winter reigned once more.

XCIV

A YEAR AGO

A year ago I too was proud of May,
I too delighted in the blackbird's song.
When the sun shone my soul made holiday.
When the rain fell I felt it as a wrong.
Then for me too the world was fresh and young.
Oh what a miracle each bluebell was !
How my heart leaped in union with my tongue,
When first I lit upon a stag's horn moss !
—A year ago ! Alas, one Summer's fire,
One autumn's chill, one Winter's discontent,
And now one Spring of joy and hope deferred
Have brought me to this pass of undesire
That I behold May's veil of beauty rent
And stand unmoved by sun and flower and bird.

XCV

HE IS NOT A POET

I would not, if I could, be called a poet.
I have no natural love of the "chaste muse."
If aught be worth the doing I would do it ;
And others, if they will, may tell the news.
I care not for their laurels but would choose
On the world's field to fight or fall or run.
My soul's ambition will not take excuse
To play the dial rather than the sun.
The faith I held I hold, as when a boy
I left my books for cricket-bat and gun.
The tales of poets are but scholars' themes.
In my hot youth I held it that a man
With heart to dare and stomach to enjoy
Had better work to his hand in any plan
Of any folly, so the thing were done,
Than in the noblest dreaming of mere dreams.

XCVI

ON THE SHORTNESS OF TIME

If I could live without the thought of death,
Forgetful of time's waste, the soul's decay,
I would not ask for other joy than breath
With light and sound of birds and the sun's ray.
I could sit on untroubled day by day
Watching the grass grow, and the wild flowers range
From blue to yellow and from red to grey
In natural sequence as the seasons change.
I could afford to wait, but for the hurt
Of this dull tick of time which chides my ear.
But now I dare not sit with loins ungirt
And staff unlifted, for death stands too near.
I must be up and doing—ay, each minute.
The grave gives time for rest when we are in it.

XCVII

CHANCELBURY RING

Say what you will, there is not in the world
A nobler sight than from this upper Down.
No rugged landscape here, no beauty hurled
From its Creator's hand as with a frown;
But a green plain on which green hills look down
Trim as a garden plot. No other hue
Can hence be seen, save here and there the brown
Of a square fallow, and the horizon's blue.
Dear checker-work of woods, the Sussex Weald!
If a name thrills me yet of things of earth,
That name is thine. How often I have fled
To thy deep hedgerows and embraced each field,
Each lag, each pasture,—fields which gave me birth
And saw my youth, and which must hold me dead.

XCVIII

SONNET IN ASSONANCE

A¹ thousand bluebells blossom in the wood,
Shut in a tangled brake of briar roses,
And guarded well from every wanton foot,
A treasure by no eye of man beholden,
No eye but mine. No other tongue hath spoken
Out to the joyless world what hidden joys
Lie there untasted, mines of wealth unnoted,
While a starved world without lives blank and void.
—Ah, couldst thou know, poor wretch, what I have known.
See what I saw upon that bank enshrined,
Soft pity had not wholly left thy soul
And tears had dimmed thy hard eyes uninvited.
Eyes that are cruel-bright with hunger's brightness,
Hunger for beauty, solitude, and peace.
There hadst thou found a beauty and a silence,
Such as nor tongue can tell nor fancy dream.

XCIX

YOUTH

Youth, ageless youth, the old gods' attribute !
—To inherit cheeks a-tingle with such blood
As wood nymphs blushed, who to the first-blown flute
Went out in endless dancing through the wood.
To live, and taste of that immortal food
After the wild day's waste prepared for us
By deathless hands, and straightway be renewed,
Like the god's entrails upon Caucasus.
To rise at dawn with eye and brain and sense
Clear as the pale green edge where dawn began,
While each bold thought full shapen should arise,
Cutting the horizon of experience,
Sharp as an obelisk.—Ah, wretched Man !
'Tis little wonder that the gods are wise.

AGE

O Age, thou art the very thief of joy,
For thou hast rifled many a proud fool
Of all his passions, hoarded by a rule
Of stern economy. Him, yet a boy,
Harsh wisdom governed. Others turned to toy
With lusty passion. He was chaste and cool
As a young Dorian in Lycurgus' school.
Ah me, that thou such souls shouldst dare annoy.
Thus did he gather him a store of pleasure,
Nor cared to touch what he so hardly won,
But led long years of solitary strife ;
And, when the rest should have consumed their treasure,
He thought to sit him in the evening sun
And taste the sweet fruits of a sober life.

61

THE SAME CONTINUED

But thou didst come upon him ere he wist,
A silent highwayman, and take his all
And leave him naked, when the night should fall
And all the road was conjured in a mist.
Too well thou keepedst thy unholy tryst,
As long ago that eastern seneschal
Rode all day long to meet at evenfall
Him he had fled ere yet the sun uprist.
—But I have spent me like a prodigal
The treasure of my youth, and, long ago,
Have eaten husks among the hungry swine,
And when I meet thee I will straightway fall
Upon thy neck, and if the tears shall flow,
They shall be tears of love for thee and thine.

CII

THE VENUS OF MILO

What art thou ? Woman ? Goddess ? Aphrodite ?
Yet never such as thou from the cold foam
Of ocean, nor from cloudy heaven might come,
Who wast begotten on her bridal night
In passionate Earth's womb by Man's delight,
When Man was young. I cannot trace in thee
Time's handiwork. Say, rather, where is he
For whom thy face was red which is so white ?
Thou standest ravished, broken, and thy face
Is writ with ancient passions. Thou art dumb
To my new love. Yet, whatsoe'er of good,
Of crime, of pride, of passion, or of grace
In woman is, thou, woman, hast in sum.
Earth's archetypal Eve. All Womanhood.

CIII

WRITTEN AT FLORENCE

O world, in very truth thou art too young,
When wilt thou learn to wear the garb of age ?
World, with thy covering of yellow flowers,
Hast thou forgot what generations sprung
Out of thy loins and loved thee and are gone ?
Hast thou no place in all their heritage
Where thou dost only weep that I may come
Nor fear the mockery of thy yellow flowers ?
O world, in very truth thou art too young.
The heroic wealth of passionate emprise
Built thee fair cities for thy naked plains.
How hast thou set thy summer growth among
The broken stones which were their palaces !
Hast thou forgot the darkness where *he* lies
Who made thee beautiful, or have thy bees
Found out his grave to build their honeycombs ?

CIV

THE SAME CONTINUED

O world, in very truth thou art too young,
They gave thee love who measured out thy skies,
And, when they found for thee another star,
Who made a festival and straightway hung
The jewel on thy neck. O merry world,
Hast thou forgot the glory of those eyes
Which first looked love in thine ? Thou hast not furled
One banner of thy bridal car for them.
O world, in very truth thou art too young.
There was a voice which sang about thy Spring,
Till Winter froze the sweetness of his lips,
And lo, the worms had hardly left his tongue
Before thy nightingales were come again.
O world, what courage hast thou thus to sing ?
Say, has thy merriment no secret pain
No sudden weariness that thou art young ?

CV

PALAZZO PAGAN:

This is the house where, twenty years ago,
They spent a Spring and Summer. This shut gate
Would lead you to the terrace, and below
To a rose garden long since desolate.
Here they once lived. How often I have sat
Till it was dusk among the olive trees,
Waiting to hear their coming horse-hoofs grate
Upon the gravel ; till the freshening breeze
Bore down a sound of voices. Even yet
A broken echo of their laughter rings
Through the deserted terraces ; and see,
While I am speaking, from the parapet
There is a hand put forth, and some one flings
Her very window open overhead.
—How sweet it is, this scent of rosemary !
—These are the last tears I shall ever shed.

CVI

THE SUBLIME

To stand upon a windy pinnacle,
 Beneath the infinite blue of the blue noon,
 And underfoot a valley terrible
 As that dim gulf, where sense and being swoon
 When the soul parts ; a giant valley strewn
 With giant rocks ; asleep, and vast, and still,
 And far away. The torrent, which has hewn
 His pathway through the entrails of the hill,
 Now crawls along the bottom and anon
 Lifts up his voice, a muffled tremulous roar,
 Borne on the wind an instant, and then gone
 Back to the caverns of the middle air ;
 A voice as of a nation overthrown
 With beat of drums, when hosts have marched to war.

CVII

THE SAME CONTINUED

Clutching the brink with hands and feet and knees,
 With trembling heart, and eyes grown strangely dim,
 A part thyself and parcel of the frieze
 Of that colossal temple raised to Time,
 To gaze on horror, till, as in a crime,
 Thou and the rocks become accomplices.
 There is no voice, no life 'twixt thee and them.
 No life ! Yet, look, far down upon the breeze
 Something has passed across the bosom bare
 Of the red rocks, a leaf, a shape, a shade.
 A living shadow ! Ay, above thee there,
 Weaving majestic circles overhead,
 Others are watching.—This is the sublime
 To be alone, with eagles in the air.

CVIII

A FOREST IN BOSNIA

Spirit of Trajan ! What a world is here,
 What remnant of old Europe in this wood,
 Of life primæval rude as in the year
 When thy first legions by the Danube stood.
 These are the very Dacians they subdued,
 Swineherds and shepherds clad in skins of deer
 And fox and marten still, a bestial brood,
 Than their own swine begotten swinelier.
 The fair oak-forest, their first heritage,
 Pastures them still, and still the hollow oak
 Receives them in its bosom. Still o'erhead
 Upon the stag-head tops, grown hoar with age,
 Calm buzzards sit and ancient ravens croak,
 And all with solemn life is tenanted.

CIX

ROUMELI HISSAR

The Empire of the East, grown dull to fear
 By long companionship with angry fate,
 In silent anguish saw her doom appear
 In this dark fortress built upon the strait,
 And Sultan Mahmoud standing at her gate,
 For she must perish. Hissar many a year
 Struck terror into all who gazed thereat,
 Till in his turn the Turk had learned to wear
 The purple and fine linen of the State,
 And fell in impotence. These walls to-day,
 With Judas tree and lilac overgrown,
 Move all men's hearts. For close on barbarous power
 Tread lust and indolence, and then decay,
 Till we forgive. —The very German boor,
 Who in his day of fortune moves our scorn,
 Purged of his slough, in after ages may
 Invite the tears of nations yet unborn.

CX

THE OASIS OF SIDI KHALED

How the earth burns ! Each pebble underfoot
Is as a living thing with power to wound.
The white sand quivers, and the footfall mute
Of the slow camels strikes but gives no sound,
As though they walked on flame, not solid ground.
'Tis noon, and the beasts' shadows even have fled
Back to their feet, and there is fire around
And fire beneath, and overhead the sun.
Pitiful heaven ! What is this we view ?
Tall trees, a river, pools, where swallows fly,
Thickets of oleander where doves coo,
Shades, deep as midnight, greenness for tired eyes.
Hark, how the light winds in the palm-tops sigh.
Oh this is rest. Oh this is paradise.

CXI

TO THE BEDOUIN ARABS

Children of Shem ! Firstborn of Noah's race,
But still forever children ; at the door
Of Eden found, unconscious of disgrace,
And loitering on while all are gone before ;
Too proud to dig ; too careless to be poor ;
Taking the gifts of God in thanklessness,
Not rendering aught, nor supplicating more,
Nor arguing with Him when He hides His face.
Yours is the rain and sunshine, and the way
Of an old wisdom by our world forgot,
The courage of a day which knew not death.
Well may we sons of Japhet in dismay
Pause in our vain mad fight for life and breath,
Beholding you. I bow and reason not.

CXII

GIBRALTAR

Seven weeks of sea, and twice seven days of storm
Upon the huge Atlantic, and once more
We ride into still water and 'the calm
Of a sweet evening screened by either shore
Of Spain and Barbary. Our toils are o'er,
Our exile is accomplished. Once again
We look on Europe, mistress as of yore
Of the fair Earth and of the hearts of men.
Ay, this is the famed rock, which Hercules
And Goth and Moor bequeathed us. At this door
England stands sentry. God ! to hear the shrill
Sweet treble of her fifes upon the breeze
And at the summons of the rock gun's roar
To see her red coats marching from the hill.

CXIII

TO ONE WITH HIS SONNETS

This is the book. For evil and for good,
What my life was in it is written plain.
These are no dreams, but things of flesh and blood,
The past that lived and shall not live again.
This is the book. I dare not bid you read.
Too much of my poor soul you would unlock.
Your own soul, if it tender were, might bleed.
I could not bear that you should only mock.
My life lies here. And yet in vain, dear heart,
The tale is told. One page it yearns to see,
One play where one best actor should find part.
But that, alas for love ! shall never be.
Yet, if a sign you seek between these lines,
One hidden lies for you, a sign of signs.

CXIV

A LATER DEDICATION

1892

To her the sweetest, fairest, worthiest one,
Who the inspirer is of my new praise,
Whom lately once, one Autumn afternoon,
I walked with nor told aught a lover says,
And yet who knows I love her in all ways
A maiden dreams : the suppliant at her throne,
The counsellor of strength, the lord of lays
Loyal to chastity and her alone,
These rhymes I dedicate. Oh, if there be
Still in this world of vanished creeds and kings
Some faith in royal blood and right divine,
Some lingering reverence paid to majesty,
Here seek it and here find it, for it clings
To each hushed verse like incense to a shrine.

THE LOVE LYRICS OF PROTEUS

THE LOVE LYRICS OF PROTEUS

SONG.—LOVE ME A LITTLE

Love me a little, love me as thou wilt,
Whether a draught it be of passionate wine
Poured with both hands divine,
Or just a cup of water spilt
On dying lips and mine.
Give me the love thou wilt,
The purity, the guilt,
So it be thine.

Love me a little. Let it be thy cheek
With its red signals. That were dear to kiss.
Or, if thou mayest not this;
A finger-tip my own to seek
At nightfall when none guess.
Eyes have the wit to speak,
And sighs send messages :
Even give less.

Love me a little. Let it be in words
Of happy omen heralding thy choice,
Or in a veiled sad voice
Of warning, like a frightened bird's.
How should I not rejoice,
Though swords be crossed with swords
And discord mar love's chords
And tears thy voice ?

Love me a little. All my world thou art.
Thy much were Heaven : thy little Earth shall be.
If not Eternity,
Then Time be mine, the human part,
A single hour with thee.
Love as thou wilt and art,
With all or half a heart,
So thou love me.

SONG.—OH FOR A DAY OF SPRING

Oh for a day of Spring,
A day of flowers and folly,
Of birds that pipe and sing
And boyhood's melancholy !
I would not grudge the laughter,
The tears that followed after.

Oh for a day of youth,
A day of strength and passion,
Of words that told the truth
And deeds the truth would fashion !
I would not leave untasted
One glory while it lasted.

Oh for a day of days,
A day with you and pleasure,
Of love in all its ways
And life in all its measure !
Win me that day from sorrow,
And let me die to-morrow.

TWENTY DAYS

TWENTY days are barely gone,

I was merry all the day.

Folly was my butt of scorn.

Now the fool myself I play.

Wit and learning ruled my head,

Logic and economy.

All the books I ever read

Taught me only vanity.

Most of all it moved my mirth

Womankind the world should rule.

Man, the lord of all the Earth !

He, forsooth, a woman's tool !

Cherry lip and glancing eye !

What were rosy cheeks to me ?

Beauty's truth was 'but a lie—

Witness tomes of history !

Twenty days had barely run.

Twenty years they well might be.

All my wisdom was undone,

Reason bade good-night to me.

Her hair was of the red red gold,

Her blue eyes looked me through and through.

She was twenty-three years old,

I was twenty years and two.

Fortune, fame, I freely give,

Honour's self, if so she please,

Sweetly in her smile to live

Other twenty days like these.

LOVE'S LIKENINGS

He. To what, love, shall I liken thee ?
Thou, methinks, shalt firstly be
A blue flower with nodding bells
In the hollow of a tree.
When the wind blows wantonly,
Thou shalt ever shake thy head
At the idle tale he tells.
But at evening from the clover,
When the world is all abed,
And the noisy day is over,
And the birds have gone to rest,
In the darkness will I hover
Till thou bid me come to thee,
Till I creep into thy nest,
I thy long-expected lover,
I thy sweet, thy honey bee.
To what, love, shall I liken thee ?
Tell me, love, what wouldst thou be ?

She. I would be a white cloud lying
In the bosom of the sky,
And at noon, when Earth is sighing
For the sun my fleeces hide,
I would bask in his bright eye,
Till he drew me up on high,
Till he took me for his bride.
Thou shalt be my sun to me.

Love, but I would be a well
In the sands of Araby,
So thyself wert a gazelle
Which must either drink or die.

Bend above me, love, and lo !
In my waters thou shalt spy
All that my heart cares to show,
Thy own face against the sky.

He. To what more shall I likén thee ?
Thou, my love, shalt lastly be
A clear silver-tonguèd brook
Running downwards to the Sea,
And the reeds shall seek to stay thee
Under every shaded nook,
And the pebbles shall waylay thee,
With their bald heads to dismay thee,
Till thy pretty face grows white,
Half in anger, half in fright.
See, thy troubles are forgot
In the still pool suddenly,
And a smile has found thee out,
Taking shape of thy delight,
Laughing, weeping, onward ever
Till thou join thyself to me,
For my love shall be the river.
Thou and I shall run together
Ever till we meet the Sea.

SONG.—RED, RED GOLD

RED, red gold, a kingdom's ransom, child,
To weave thy yellow hair she bade them spin.
At early dawn the gossamer spiders toiled,
And wove the sunrise in.

She took the treasures of the deep blue noon,
She took the clear eyes of the morning star,
The pale-faced lilies of a seven-days moon,
The dust of Phœbus' car.

She painted thee with dewdrops from the flowers,
Stained with their petals, hyacinth and rose,
And violets all wet with April showers
And snowdrops from the snows.

A RHAPSODY

THERE is a God most surely in the heavens,
Who smileth always, though His face be hid.
And young Joy cometh as His messenger
Upon the Earth, like to a rushing wind,
Scattering the dead leaves of our discontent
Ere yet we see him. Then he setteth us
Upon his back and flieth to God's presence,
Till on our faces there is seen the light
Which streameth from His brows for evermore.

There is a God. Ay, by this breath of dawn,
I swear there is a God, even here on Earth.
And see, a blush upon the edge of heaven,
Bearing me witness ! There is something changed
About these woods since yesterday ; a look
Of shame on Nature's face ; a consciousness
In the bent flowers ; a troubled tell-tale gleam
On the lake's brim. This morning, as I passed
Over the lawn, there was an instant's hush
Among the trees, and then a whispering
Which woke the birds ; and of a sudden, lo !
A thousand voices breathed conspiracy ;
And now a silence. There are listening ears
In all these bushes waiting till I speak.

There is a God. I swear it on the truth
Of my new joy, which is not of the Earth,
But grows within my hand, a thing of strength,

A wonder to the Earth, whose old worn heart
Has long been joyless. Listen, while I speak,
Ye autumn woods. Ye ancient forest trees,
Lend me your ears. Thou little brook, be still
Till I have spoken, for I have a tale
For the morning's ear ; and O ! thou Nature's voice,
Be silent this one day and hear of joy
Newer than thine. You friends whom I have loved,
Listen, and stop me not with word or sign
Till I have poured my heart into your ears,
For if you spoke to me I should not hear,
And if you wept with me I should not see,
And if you mocked me I should not suspect,
Being this day the fool of happiness.
And all my blood is full of dancing motes ;
And in my brain are chords of silver tone
Divinely struck to statelier harmonies
Than Heaven's own harping ; and my eyes have tears
Which brim and quiver, but they will not fall,
For they are far too happy in my eyes.
Tears,—what of tears ? which are but new delights,
New visions of new joys which none have seen,
And which are mine. Such only Solomon
Saw when he sat upon his ivory throne,
And lo ! the pageantry of Sheba came,
Bearing its queen upon a sandal bed,
And laid her at his feet. These even I,
Who live and speak with you, have seen to-night.

And mark, how simply wonders come about
And take our hearts by storm, as in the night
Fate creeps upon a city. I had fled
Four months ago, when July nights were young,
Out to the wilderness to be alone.
Four months, four summer months among the hills,

So far from my old life I had forgot
All to my name None knew me but my dog,
And he was secret. Thus, in pedlar's guise,
With pack and staff, and bartering such small wares
Of pills and ointments as the vulgar love,
And gathering simples, I had worked my way
Through every valley of the Candriote hills.
Four summer months of silence, and the balm
Of the green pastures where the cattle go
In the long droughts; among the giant rocks
Which are the walls of heaven, the ibex' home;
Among the dells where the green lizards lurk,
Waiting for sunrise. Oh, I knew them all,
The speckled birds which live among the stones.
I made new friendship with each grass and weed,
Each moss and lichen. Every flower became
Like a familiar face, and as I passed
The harebell nodded to me from her stem,
The gentian opened wide her sapphire eyes,
And the Alp-roses blushed. But, most of all,
The butterflies were 'mine. I marked each one,
As he came sailing down upon the wind,
A furlong off. The Argus looked at me
Out of his hundred eyes and did not move.
I could have counted you the purple spots
On great Apollo's wings. The shepherds came,
And brought their sick, that I might heal their woes
With my poor knowledge, and I learned in turn
Much weather-wisdom, and some wisdom too
Fresh from their human hearts 'twas wealth to know.

And thus I lived and dreamed and drank the wind
Which snows had cooled; and often I have stood
On some tall pinnacle above the plain,
And watched the clouds come flying on the breeze

To tear their fleeces on the jagged rocks,
Until they caught and folded me about
In their damp garments ; and, when these were gone,
And the sun broke through the rain, my very soul
Laughed with the sun, washed white as a christened child,
And all was clean forgotten but its joy.
Such life was mine the short sweet summer through ;
But when the August days were fled away
And nights grew chill, I came to Bannastal
On the Uranian sea, and there my fate
Was waiting for me, though I knew it not.

My fate, and what a fate ! Oh, Lytton, now
I see my life transfigured like a seer's.
My eyes are open. I read plain the meaning
Of all that I beheld and heard and knew
Through the past summer, as in words of fire :
The sadness of my soul, my pilgrimage
Among the hills, each flower upon my way,
The sun, the stars, the passionate face of heaven,
The virtue of the earth, which expectation
Peopled for me with signs and prophecies,
All, all foretold the coming of a god.
Nay more, each hope, each fancy, each desire,
Each separate thought which I have thought, each sorrow
Laid on my heart, each unseen accident
Met in my road, each word, each look, each choice,
Each idle dream that I have dreamt in folly,
From my first hour till now, I do acknowledge
As the great forecast of a glorious fate,
Of hope made ecstasy and life made love.

And thus it is I learned the very truth
That God is on this earth. For twenty days
Are come and gone, and twenty nights have been

More sunny than those days, since these things were ;
 And I still ride upon the back of joy,
 Which bears me bravely. Still the flowers blow.
 St. Martin's summer has brought back the birds
 To sing in these old gardens as in June.
 —Listen. I hear one like the nightingale,
 But sweeter and less sad, and thus she sings :

SONG.—OH FLY NOT, PLEASURE

Oh fly not, Pleasure, pleasant-hearted Pleasure.
 Fold me thy wings, I prithee, yet and stay.
 For my heart no measure
 Knows nor other treasure
 To buy a garland for my love to-day.

And thou too, Sorrow, tender-hearted Sorrow.
 Thou grey-eyed mourner, fly not yet away.
 For I fain would borrow
 Thy sad weeds to-morrow
 To make a mourning for love's yesterday.

The voice of Pity, Time's divine dear Pity,
 Moved me to tears. I dared not say them nay,
 But went forth from the city
 Making thus my ditty
 Of fair love lost for ever and a day.

SONG.—WHY DO I LOVE ?

WHY do I love ?
 Is it for men to choose
 The hour of the hushed night when crowned with dews
 From its sea grave the morning star shall wake ?
 Lo, while we drowsed, it rose on our heart's ache,
 And all our heaven was red with the day's hues,
 And glad birds chaunted from the trees above.
 So was it with my heart that might not choose
 But woke to love.

Why do I love ?
The aureole of lost days
Is on thy brow and unforgotten face ;
Faith's guiding light, the same which of old time
Sent men on knightly quests to deeds sublime
And the high prize which was their lady's grace.
Thither I follow, careless what shall prove,
So only at thy knees a little space
I too may love.

Why do I love ?
The paths of life are steep,
And dark the issues and the gulfs how deep !
This wayside shrine invites my knees to kneel.
Thou, dearest Saint, in witness of my zeal
Biddest me walk in joy who only weep,
And fare forth comforted who vainly strove.
See how my steps in thy sweet service leap !
See how I love !

Why do I love ?
There is a dream that stirs
My soul to its last depth of lost desires,
Music of waters in a thirsty land,
A step, a touch, the lingering of a hand,
Fingers that are the soft Spring's messengers,
And lips that to my kisses part and move
With passionate words which yet—how strange !—are
hers,
Pleading for love.

Why do I love ?
If one had told me this,
When I erewhile in the world's wilderness
Wandered uncertain or of Heaven or Hell,
How had I laughed as at a time-worn tale !

To-day, behold. I too speak prophecies,
And hang my votive garland in the grove,
And supplicate my god, and kneel and kiss
Her feet for love.

Why do I love ?

Ah, love, I will not make
A longer reasoning even for thy sake ;
Be it enough that I am pleasure's thrall.
Tell me thy will, in song or madrigal
Or word unspoken. Bid me bend or break,
And brave all wraths of Earth or Heaven above,
But not thy wrath. Ah ! bid me not awake.
Bid me still love.

PICTURES ON ENAMEL

WHEN Astraled was lying, like to die
Of love's green sickness, all his bed was strown
With buds of crocus and anemone,
For other flowers yet were barely none,
And these he loved. And so it came to pass
That, when they deemed he slept, then one by one
The watchers left him for the Candlemas ;
And thus he chanced upon his bed alone
When the day broke. You might have deemed he was
An image of Hope slain by drear Oblivion.

The chamber where he lay was hushed as sorrow,
Which is joy's anteroom. The holy night,
In silent expectation of the morrow,
Gazed on the moon, as some fair anchorite
On her own chastity, until the sight
Made her heart ache. But, as the morning broke,

Down the dim lobby came Somandolin,
With her thick hair around her like a cloak,
Even to her feet. I wot she might have been
The dawn's own sister. Clad in mystic white,
More beautiful than awe, came that fair woman in.

Long while she stood before the dreaming boy,
Still as he lay on crimson cushions piled.
And when she bent o'er him, her breath did toy
With his dank hair. Long while she stood and smiled
As smiled Elisha on the widow's child
In Shunam. For although her lips were sad
As a broken bow, if you had read their meaning
You would have learned the sense that smiling had
Was less of sorrow than of joy beguiled
To grief at the sad world and its revealing,
As when the name of Death is whispered to a child.

Doubtless that lady knew the spell to win
The life-blood back ; for, when she bent her down
And laid her cheek to his that was so thin,
The shut lips quivered and let fall a moan,
As in sweet pain. And next Somandolin
Put her white hand upon the sleeper's arm
Entangled in his tresses. She could feel
The curls crisp back like leaves when they grow warm
Before a watchfire. Then she took his chin
In her two palms, and bade his eyes unseal
Their close-shut lids, and laid her lips upon his own.

Slowly, as in a trance of wonderment,
Those blue eyes opened wide, as from the dead
His spirit stole. Old memories came and went
Like summer lightnings, and a murmur sped
To his dull ear, until he deemed it said,

In a new tongue which none might heed but he,
" Arise and worship, for behold thy bed
And all about thee is as holy ground ! "
And then he cried, " Behold, dear love, I rise ! "
And on a sudden, waking from his swoond,
A countenance of tearful majesty
And strange ecstatic love looked in his eyes.

These things were written for a mystery
In the Book of Life, lest lovers in their need
Should faint for hunger by the road and die.
Thus were they written. Though a god should read,
He could not choose but learn a newer creed,
Transcending his own knowledge. For anon,
The Mass being ended, came the rest with speed,
Bearing with them the blest viaticum
And holy oils, nor guessed he needed not,
Who sought him a long hour. The warder told
Erewhile a knight, belike Sir Astraed,
With a white lady rode the castle out,
And all his harness was of burnished gold,
Who, pricking fast towards the rising sun,
Was gone beyond the hills upon his battle-steed.

ADONIS

THE gods did love Adonis, and for this
He died, ere time had furrowed his young cheek.
For Aphrodité slew him with a kiss.
He sighed one sigh, as though he fain would speak .
The name he loved, but that his breath grown weak
Died on his lips. So died the summer breeze ;
And all the wood was hushed a minute's space,
Where I stood listening underneath the trees,
Until a wood-chat from her secret place

Chirped in an undertone, "*He is not dead,
Not dead, for lo ! the bloom upon his face
Is ruddy as the newly-blossomed rose
Which even yet is woven round his head.
But sleep, more sweet than waking dream, doth close
The laughter of his eyes. He is not dead.*"

Alone in that fair wood the livelong day
And through the silent night I watched him near.
But in the morning he was fled away,
When broke the dawn upon me cold and clear.
I looked within the thicket where he lay ;
And lo ! the sod, which he had pressed in death,
Was white with blossoms, scattered from the may,
Which made the thick air sweet with their sweet breath.
But he was gone ; and I went o'er the heath,
Clutching, like one distraught, the dim air grey
With dawning,—for a voice encompassed me,
Crying, " Fair boy, thy youth was but a span,
Yet did it circle in eternity'.
Thy epic was accomplishèd. A man
Fills but the measure of his destiny,
And thine was all complete. Ere age began
To mar the royal palace of thy youth
With upper storeys of less perfect plan,
Death, kindly Death, filled with immortal ruth,
Took back the trowel from the builder's hand,
And wrote his ' fecit ' on thy work of truth."

A NOCTURNE

THE Moon has gone to her rest,
A full hour ago.
The Pleiads have found a nest
In the waves below.

Slow, the Hours one by one
 In Midnight's footsteps creep.
 Lovers who lie alone
 Soon wake to weep.
Slow-footed tortoise Hours, will ye not hasten on,
 Till from his prison
 In the golden East
 A new day shall have risen,
 And the last stars be gone,
 Like guests belated from a bridal feast ?
 When the long night is done
 Then shall ye sleep.

SONG.—THE DEATH OF THE ROSE

AH ! life, dear life, thy summer days have flown
 Swiftly yet all too late, for they did wither.
 Joy should be joy for one short hour alone,
 Or it will lose its loveliness for ever.

I did not spare to use the cruel knife,
 But cut the rose as soon as it was day,
 And gave it to my love. Its little life
 Passed, like a sigh, from Nature's breast away.

Full-hearted flower, thou didst not shrink nor flee
 When the steel touched thee. No sad memories
 Made what thou knew not terrible to thee,
 And death came on thee like a sad surprise.

Too happy flower ! I would my love had died
 At unawares, by such a death as thine.
 I should have slain my love in its full pride,
 So had it lived and been for ever mine,

A treasure for all joy to ponder on,
Laid up for aye in old Time's palaces,
A "thing of beauty" which my soul had won,
And death had made undying with a kiss.

SONG OF THE DESERT LARK

Love, love, in vain
We count the days of Spring.
Lost is all love's pain,
Lost the songs we sing.
Sunshine and Summer rain,
Winter and Spring again
Still the years shall bring,
But we die.

Love, what a noon
Of happy love was ours !
Grief came too soon,
Touched the Autumn flowers,
Grief and the doubt of death,
Mixed with the roses' breath.
Darkly the Winter lowers,
And we die.

His torch, love, the Sun
Turns to the stormy West,
Like a fair dream begun
Changing to jest.
Love, while our souls are one,
Still let us sing the Sun,
Sing and forget the rest
And so die.

SONG.—GLAD BIRD, I DO BEWAIL THEE

GLAD bird, I do bewail thee,
Thy song it was so sweet
That Earth looked up to hail thee
Till wings grew to her feet.
But, ah ! thy mate is lying dead
Among the new-mown hay,
And a fowler comes to jail thee
Where thou shalt pine away.

Bright butterfly, I wail thee,
So dainty was thy wing,
So bravely didst regale thee
On every honied thing.
But thou art all too lightly clad
For any month but May,
And Autumn rains shall trail thee
And wash thy paint away.

Sweet childhood, I bewail thee.
Thy smile it shifteth ever
As the ship that thou dost sail thee
Adown the running river.
But ah ! life's river runneth fast
And forward lies the sea,
And what shall then avail thee
Thy laughter and thy glee ?

And youth, I most bewail thee,
Thy purpose was so great,
But the fools that did assail thee
Were stronger than thy fate,

And thy heart it was so ruddy red
That every archer knew
Where he might best impale thee
And drive his arrows through.

SONG.—WILT THOU TAKE ME FOR THY
SLAVE ?

WILT thou take me for thy slave,
With my folly and my love ?
Wilt thou take me for the bondsman of thy pride ?
Thou who dearer art to me than all the world beside ;
For I love thee as no other man can love.

Wilt thou take me to thy soul,
For the truth which thou shalt prove ?
Wilt thou clothe me with the riches of thy care ?
Thou who dearer art to me than gold and jewels rare ;
For I love thee as no other man can love.

Wilt thou take me for thy king,
While the sun and stars shall move ?
Wilt thou pay me back the homage I have given ?
Oh thou dearer unto me than sun and stars and heaven !
For I love thee as no other man can love.

SONG.—FOR THEE

WHAT woes are there
I would not choose to bear
For thy dear sake ?
Curses were blest, the ache
Of sorrow's scourging and grief's crown of care.
All pain were dear to me,
But it must be
For thee.

A sun grown cold,
Earth wrapped in vaporous fold,
The corn-flowers' head
Robbed of their blue and red,
The buttercups and daisies of their gold.
This could I choose to see,
But it must be
For thee.

The notes unheard
Of lark and piping bird,
Or else their songs
Replaced by harsher tongues,
No voice to sing to me or speak a word.
This too were joy to me,
But it must be
For thee.

A life alone,
One left with others' gone,
A mourning house,
Where none moves but the mouse
Or knows the secret of its pale guests flown.
Grief's tears were sweet to me,
But it must be
For thee.

Night without sleep,
Slow hours that halt and creep,
A cheerless bed
Where Love nor lays his head
Nor looks with pity on blind eyes that weep.
Watching were rest to me,
But it must be
For thee.

Passion, once sure,
With vain expense grown poor,
 Cheeks ruddy white
 Now crocussed with affright,
And Love the guest all coldly shown the door.
 Love's loss were gain to me,
 But it must be
 For thee.

Glory forsworn,
The World's praise changed to scorn,
 Silence of friends,
 Foes gaining all their ends
Through fault of fortune and my sword undrawn.
 Hatred were love to me,
 But it must be
 For thee.

Life's purpose vast
Turned to base ends and cast
 On lines of ill "
 Which faltering downward still
Shall topple headlong to the gulf at last.
 Life's shame were pride to me,
 But it must be
 For thee.

A guarded cell,
Where crime and madness dwell,
 Where murder creeps
 And maniac laughter weeps,
With the undying worm for last farewell.
 There let me die, sad me,
 But it must be
 For thee.

O Soul of mine !
Thou wert a thing divine,
 But made in vain.
 Then be thou broke in twain
And spilled upon time's empty sands like wine.
 My soul no Heaven would see,
 But it must be
 For thee.

THE STRICKEN HART

THE stricken hart had fled the brake,
His courage spent for life's dear sake.
He came to die beside the lake.

The golden trout leaped up to view,
The moorfowl clapped his wings and crew,
The swallow brushed him as she flew.

He looked upon the glorious sun,
His blood dropped slowly on the stone,
He loved the life so nearly won,

And then he died. The ravens found
A carcase couched upon the ground,
They said their god had dealt the wound.

The Eternal Father calmly shook
One page untitled from life's book.
Few words. None ever cared to look.

Yet woe for life thus idly riven.
He blindly loved what God had given,
And love, some say, has conquered Heaven.

SONG.—LILAC AND GOLD AND GREEN

LILAC and gold and green !

Those are the colours I love the best,
Spring's own raiment untouched and clean,

When the world is awake and yet hardly dressed,
And the stranger sun, her bridegroom shy,
Looks at her bosom and wonders why

She is so beautiful, he so blest.

Lilac and green and gold !

Those were the colours you wore to-day,
Robed you were in them fold on fold,

Clothed in the light of your love's delay.
And I held you thus in my arms, once only,
And wondered still, as you left me lonely,

How the world's beauty was changed to grey.

Lilac and gold and green !

I would die for the truth of those colours true !
Lilac for loyalty, gold for my queen,

And green the faith of my love for you.
Here is a posy of all the three.

My heart is with it. So think of me,

And our weeping skies shall once more be blue.

SONG.—TO HER WHOSE NAME

To her whose name,
With its sweet sibilant sound like sudden showers
Splashing the grass and flowers,

Hath set my April heart aflame ;

To her whose face,
The flower and crown of all created things,
Dearer than even Spring's,
Hath been to me a sacrament of grace ;

Whose luminous mind,
Stored with all gladness of the earth and sky,
Hath lightened my sad eye
And made it wise in love which erst was blind ;

Whose voice of pleasure,
Calling to joys as a blithe wedding bell
When ringers ring it well,
Hath tuned my soul to its own happy measure ;

Whose blessed hand,
With its white mystery of fingers five,
Each one a soul alive,
Hath taught me truths no angels understand ;

Whose arms within,
Should she once clasp me to her very heart,
God knoweth we should not part
But live for aye in Heaven's own bliss divine ;

To her, alas,
Who is so near, yet standeth still so far,
Seeing the mortal bar
Betwixt us ever which we cannot pass,

These lines I send
With my heart's tears to-night beseeching her,
Of her dear love more dear,
To be no less to me my sweetest soul and friend.

DEAD JOYS

MOAN on with thy loud changeless wail,
Desolate sea,
Grinding thy pebbles into thankless sand.
Oh, could I lash my angry heart like thee
Until it broke upon an iron land,
The very rocks should tremble and turn pale
To be the witness of my agony.

Fierce wind, the sob of thy dull pitiless voice
Is thick with snow.
Hiss out thy tale into my ice-bound ear
In sleety whispers, for full well I know
That in thy wanderings thou hast seen my joys,
My young joys, dead in some far hemisphere,
A land of blackness and colossal woe.

Naked they lay, my shipwrecked mariners,
Upon the shore.
The low moon pointed her long fingers, red
As a murderer's hand, between their prison bars
In the ribbed wreck, which hungry ocean tore
At the first spring-tide to reclaim the dead
And hide them in his jaws for evermore.

Tell me, thou silence, what sad death they died,
Poor castaways !
What wolfish eyes were on each other there,
When they had eaten all that hunger stays,
And thirst no longer could be quenched with pride !
Didst thou not see their teeth grow white and bare,
Grinding a savage thought for many days,

Until they fell upon their own red hearts ?
Thou didst not see,
Or Thou hadst surely had some pity, God,
When they crept gnawing to the vital parts,
My joys, which I had nursed so tenderly
In the very cradle of my love's abode.
Or art Thou pitiless as wind or sea ?

AT A FUNERAL

I LOVED her too, this woman who is dead.
Look in my face. I have a right to go
And see the place where you have made her bed
Among the snow.

I loved her too whom you are burying.
I have a right to stand beside her bier,
And to my handful of the dust I fling,
That she may hear.

I loved her ; and it was not for the eyes
Which you have shut, nor for her yellow hair,
Nor for the face which in your bosom lies.
Let it lie there !

Nor for the wild-birds' music of her voice,
Which we shall hear in dreams till we too sleep ;
Nor for the rest, which made the world rejoice,
The angels weep.

It was not for the payment of sweet love,
Though love is often straitened for a kiss,
Nor for the hope of other joys above,
But only this,

That she had laid her hand upon my heart

Once in the summer time when we were young,
And that her finger-tips had left a smart,
And that my tongue

Had spoken words which might not be unspoken

Lest they should make a by-word of love's truth,
And I had sworn that love should be the token
Of my youth.

And so I gave her all, and long ago

The treasure of my youth was put in pawn ;
And she was little richer that I know
When that was gone.

But I have lived a beggar since that day

And hide my face it may be from men's eyes ;
For often I have seen them shrink away,
As in surprise

That such a loathsome cripple should be found

To walk abroad in daylight with the rest,
And scarce a rag to cover up the wound
Upon his breast.

Yet no man stopped to ask how this might be,

Or I had scared them, and let loose my tongue,
How I had bought myself this misery
When I was young.

Yet I have loved her. This must be my pay,

The pension I have earned me with these tears ;
The right to kneel beside her grave to-day,
Despite these years,

With all her kisses burning on my cheek,
As when I left her and our love was dead,
And our lips trembled though they did not speak,
The night I fled ;

The right to bid you stand aside, nor be
A witness of our meeting. Did you love
In joy as I have loved in misery ?
You did not prove

Your love was stronger than the strength of death,
Or she had never died upon your hand.
I would have fed her breathing with my breath ;
I would have fanned

A living wind of Heaven to her lips ;
I would have stolen life from Paradise.
And she is dead, and you have seen eclipse
Within those eyes.

If I could know that you had loved her well ;
If I could hold it for a certainty
That you had sold your life as I did sell ;
If I could see

The blackness of your soul, and with my tongue
Taste the full bitterness of tears unshed ;
If I should find your very heart was wrung
And maimed and dead ;

If I should feel your hand's grasp crumble mine,
And hug the pain when I should grasp in turn ;
If I could dip my fingers in the brine
Of eyes that burn ;

If I could hear your voice call back the dead
With such a mighty cry of agony
That she should turn and listen in the bed
Where she doth lie,

And all the heavens should together roll,
Thinking they heard the angel's trumpet tone,
I could forget it that you bought a soul
Which was my own ;

I could forget that she forgot her vows,
That aught was bartered for the wealth of love ;
I could untell the story of my woes,
Till God above

Should hold her guiltless and condone the wrong
Done to His justice ; I could take your hand
And call you brother, as we went along
To take our stand

Before His judgment-seat with her again
Where we are hurrying,—for we could not keep
Our place unchallenged in the ranks of men
Who do not weep.

THE BROKEN PITCHER

ACCURSED be the hour of that sad day
The careless potter put his hand to thee,
And dared to fashion out of common clay
So pure a shape as thou didst seem to me.

An idle boy, when vintage was begun,
I passed and saw thy beauty for my sin,
And poured unheeding till it was done
The red wine of my love's first gathering in.

And thou, ah ! thou didst look at me and smile
To see me give with such ungrudging hand,
As taking all to thy dear heart, the while
It only fell upon the thirsty sand.

Sad pitcher, thou wast broken at the well,
Ere yet the shepherd's lip had tasted thine.
A god had lost in thee his hydromel,
As I have wasted my poor wealth of wine.

Yet, wherefore wast thou made so fair a thing ?
Or why of clay, whose fabric rightly were
Of finest gold, new-fashioned for a king,
And framed by some divine artificer ?

I will not curse thee, thou poor shape of clay,
That thou art other than thou seemed to be,
Yet I will break thee, that no passer may
Unthinking break another heart on thee.

AN UNWRITTEN TRAGEDY

Ho, ye that thirst beside the running stream !
Love is a running stream, whose waters flow
Upon the earth, and who would drink thereof
Must bend him earthwards. There was such an one
Who lay upon his belly in the mire
And was not ashamed. Because he deemed it well
That love, which is the strength of weaker things,
Should make of Man a child. And, while he lay
And summer winds were drowsing in his ears,
The river of his love went rippling by.

And thus he lived, and thus he might have died,
Deaf to his fellows' scorn, and held it gain
To lie a living corse unburied there
Among the reeds of Time and hidden in
From the world's stare. But Fate, was watching him
With envious eyes ; and he had merited
In truth much retribution at her hand.
—Alas that I should have such spite to tell !
She took her vengeance at the fountain head,
And made a desolation in the land.

And how he dreamed and half outwitted Fate,
Because his mind was single in his love ;
And how she took the pitiless winds in pay
And set a wrack of clouds upon their back ;
And how, because she could not master him,
She turned the waters of his love away ;
And how that man arose up from his lair,
Foul with the ooze and with a beard grown grey
Through his long shame ; and how he turned and fled
From the sun's face to dwell among the tombs,

I would relate. And, if in simple words
How some have learned the nakedness of truth,
The carelessness of God, Man's cruelty
And their own folly, it would be a tale
To chill the lust of Youth and bend the knees
Of Manhood's pride before the strength of Fate
Which conquers all ;—And this I think would be
The sum of human tragedy on Earth.
—But who am I to stay the wings of Death
And pluck a feather out and write such things ?

REQUIESCIT

I CANNOT tell his story. He was one
To whom the riddle of our human life
Was strangely put, and who, because of that
And that he could not read it, died.

But a short hour
Before he passed, the woman who stood by,
Weeping as once she had wept to see him born,
Tired with her watching looked into his face
And saw the heavy eyelids dropping down
Loaded with sleep. And she, for all her tears,
Bent for the hundredth time to ease his bed.
And, as she almost touched him, smoothing out
The ruffled pillows, close into her ear
He whispered, never lifting up his eyes :
“ No matter now. I shall be soon asleep.”
And then, as if he would pursue the thought
A little way as once he loved to do,
And yet too weak to catch it, he went on :
“ And what a trouble it has been to keep
This pillow smooth ! And in a little while
It will not want another touch ; and then—
This aching head of mine will have done with thought.
Thought ! Thought ! ” But loud the aged woman sobbed,
“ Poor soul, poor gentleman.”

So they remained
For a brief space, the goodwife standing there
Knotting her wrinkled hands and he hard by
Upon the bed and breathing heavily.
For he seemed sunk again in that dull trance
Through which men often pass away from life,
When death, as the lion does, has shaken his prey
And he lies numb and dumb and powerless.

She listened. He was telling slowly over
The names of those whom he had loved in youth.
Many were strange to her ; and then there came
One she knew well. She started at the sound
She had not heard for years, and bending near
Heard him repeat it twice. She whispered hoarsely :
“ Have you no word for her ? ”—yet stopped again.
Because his eyes were open. Doubtingly
They wandered to her own and seemed to say
“ Who, and what is it that you ask ? ” And she
Spoke it again. He seemed to catch the name
And said it after her, but like a child
Which knows not what it speaks ; and afterwards :
“ Ah ! Bridget, I have quite forgot that story,
And now, in half an hour, it is not long,
I shall have clean forgotten the name too.”
She cried, “ Oh Sir, it is a life too late.
Would God you had forgot it long ago ! ”

The tears stole slowly down her withered cheeks
And fell upon his hands. She did not move
While he went murmuring on : “ ’Tis very well
Thus to forget. And what a wonder too
It now is ”—and there came a sudden light
Into his eyes—“ that one should ever care
To recollect a single day of life.
I used to think and plan and plot and scheme
How I might build my life in such a way
That I should take fine memories to my grave.
And now what a small matter ’tis to know
How the years went, when death in half an hour
Is all that is left of them ! No matter now,
But only to sleep sound in any bed
And have no dreams.”

His eyes grew dim again
As he ceased speaking. And the woman knew
That he was dying. "He is gone," she said.
And then she started muttering half aloud
"They cannot pass without the sacraments,
These gentle-folks." And so she hurried out.

The dying man smiled.

When they came again,
She whispered in his ear, and looking down
Saw him still smiling ; so she lit in haste
A candle by the bed and knelt aside.
They put the holy oils upon his hands,
Which closed upon the fingers of the priest.
The priest bent over him and laid his ear
To the half-open mouth and presently,
Thinking he heard some words, gave absolution.
But, when they would have gone on with the rest,
They found that he was dead.

They buried him
With some small pomp to comfort the old dame,
Who said her master was a gentleman
And must be followed with a mourning coach
And mutes and weepers. There was no one else.

His name is cut upon a stone. His dreams
Were written on Time's hem ; and Time has fled
And taken him and them. The grass is green
Upon his grave. I cannot doubt he sleeps.

IN THE NIGHT

WHERE art thou, thou lost face,
Which, yet a little while, wert making mirth
At these new years which seemed too sad to be ?
Where art thou fled which for a minute's space
Shut out the world and wert my world to me ?
And now a corner of this idle Earth,
A broken shadow by the day forgot,
Is wide enough to be thy hiding place,
And thou art shrunk away and needest not
The darkness of this night to cover thee.

Where art thou hidden ? In the boundless air
My hands go forth to thee, and search and feel
As through the universe. I hold the night
Caught in my arms, and yet thou art not there.
Where art thou ? What if I should strike a light
So suddenly that thou couldst never steal
Back to thy shadows ? What if I should find
Thee standing close to me with all thy hair
Trailing about me and thine eyes grown blind
With looking at me vainly through the night ?

There are three rings upon thy hand to-night,
One with a sapphire stone, and one there is
Coiled like a snake, and one on which my name
Is written in strange gems. By this dim light
I cannot read if it be writ the same.
See, I have worn no other ring but this !
Why dost thou look at it with eyes estranged ?
Is it not thine ?—Ah, God ! Thou readest right !
And it is changed, and thou and I are changed,
And I have written there another name.

Oh happiness, how has it slipped away !
We, who once lived and held it in our hand !
What is the rest that these new years can bring ?
Did we not love it in our love's to-day,
And pleasure which was so divine a thing,
The sweetest and most strange to understand ?
And that is why it left regret behind,
As though a wild bird suddenly should stay
A moment at our side and we should find
When we looked up that it had taken wing.

And thou, hast thou forgotten how to love ?
Hast thou no kissing in thy lips ? Thy tongue,
Has it no secret whisper for my ear ?
I have been watching thee to see thee move
A little closer to my side in fear
Of the long night. Oh, there is room among
The pillows for thy head if thou wouldst sleep !
And thou art cold, and I would wrap my love
To my warm breast and so my vigil keep
And be alone with darkness and with her.

Thou standest with thy hand upon my heart,
As once thou used to stand, to feel it beat.
Doth it beat calmer now than in those days ?
Thy foolish finger-tips will leave a smart,
If they so press upon my side. Thy gaze
Is burning me. Oh speak a word and cheat
This darkness into pain, if pain must be,
And wake me back to sorrow with a start,
For I am weary of the night and thee
And thy strange silence and thy stranger face.

Canst thou not speak ? Thy tale was but begun.
How can I answer thee a tale untold ?

Whisper it quick before the morning break.
How loud thou weepest ! Listen, there is one
Dreaming beside me who must not awake.
Close in my ear !—Ah ! child, thy lips are cold,
Because thou art forsaken.—Misery !
Is there not room enough beneath the sun
For her, and thee, and me ?

TO HESTER ON THE STAIR

HESTER, creature of my love,
What is this ? You love not me ?
On the stair you stand above,
Looking down distrustfully
With the corners of your eyes
Watching me in mute surprise,
Me, your father, only me.

Hester, why this foolish terror,
You who know me and my ways ?
Was my love so writ in error
That it needed your disgrace ?
Is your doubt of locks grown thin
Or the beard which hides his chin
His, your father's chin and face ?

Hester, we were fools of passion
When our last goodbyes were smiled.
Now you stand in your strange fashion
By my kisses unbeguiled,
With your light foot turned to flee
While I press you to my knee,
You, my child, my only child.

Listen, Hester, I am able
Still to flatter and be fond :
You the wise crow of the fable
Perched above me and beyond.
Foolish ! Not one word you speak
To my praises of your cheek,
Not one sound, one only sound !

Be it so. My love you mock it,
And my sighs are empty wind.
See, I shut my heart and lock it
From your laughing eyes unkind.
Yet, remember this last word,
Love is two-edged like a sword.
Mind this only, only mind !

A SUMMER IN TUSCANY

Do you remember, Lucy,
How, in the days gone by
We spent a summer together,
A summer in Tuscany,
In the chestnut woods by the river,
You and the rest and I ?

Your house had the largest garden,
But ours was next to the bridge
And we had a mulberry alley
Which sloped to the water's edge.
You were always talking and laughing
On your side of the hedge.

How many sisters and brothers,
Lucy, then did you own ?

Harriet and Francis and Horace
And Phyllis, a flower half-blown.
I liked you more than the others,
For you had the longest gown.

What has become of the laughter,
What of the mulberry trees ?
Is there no record in Heaven,
No echo of days like these ?
Francis is married and happy
And Horace beyond the seas.

Phyllis was first to desert us,
She had no soul for the Earth
But lingered a guest impatient
Alike of our sorrow and mirth.
Death's step to her on the threshold
Seemed news of a glorious birth.

Harriet, whose eyes were the brightest
The fullest of innocent guile,
Has hidden her joy and our sorrow
Under a Carmelite veil.
They call her the "mother abbess."
She has hardly leisure to smile.

Do you remember the ponies
We used to ride on the hill,
Every knee of them broken,
Every back like a quill,
Cesare, Capitano,
Milor and Jack and Jill ?

High o'er the plains and the valleys,
Wherever our leader led,

We two, closest of allies,
Were with him still in his tread,
Sworn to be first on his footsteps,
To serve him alive or dead.

Dead—ah dead! Who could think it?
The laughter so strong on his lips
Had seemed an elixir of living.
Where now are his jibes and his quips,
The fair paradoxes he flung us,
The fire of him?—Lost in eclipse!

All are scattered and vanished,
Laughter and smiles and tears,
Gone with the dust on the sandals
Which cling to the feet of the years.
Time has no time to remember,
And Fortune no face for our fears.

Do you remember, Lucy,
The day which too soon had come,
The first sad day of the Autumn,
The last of our summer home,
The day of my journey to England
And yours to your convent at Rome?

We rose with the dawn that morning—
—The others were hardly awake—
And took our walk by the river.
Lucy, did your heart ache?
Or was it the chill of the sunrise
That made you shiver and shake?

Lucy, the dog rose you gave me
Still lies in its secret place.

Lucy, the tears, my fool's answer,
Have left on my cheeks a trace.
The kiss you gave me at parting
I yet can feel on my face.

These are the things I remember.
These are the things that I grieve,
The joys that are scattered and vanished,
The friends I am loath to leave.
I grudge them to death and silence
And age which is death's reprieve.

Vanished, forgotten and scattered,
All but you, Lucy, and I,
Who cling some moments together
Till Time shall have hurried us by :
A moment and yet a moment,
Till we too forget and die !

SONG.—THEY SHALL NOT KNOW

WHEN thou art happy, thou dear heart of pleasure,
Because men love thee and the feasts are spread,
And Fortune in thy lap has poured her treasure,
And Spring is there and roses crown thy head,
Then think of one who loved thee for his woe,
And, if thou sigh
With others by,
They shall not know.

When thou art silent in thy day of trouble,
Because fools vex and thou hast rivals found
And love has played thee falser than a bubble
And memory stings and grief is as a wound,

Then think of one whose hand first soothed thy brow,
And, if a smile
Thy tears beguile,
These shall not know.

When all is ended, thou pale ghost of sorrow,
And time's last flower is gathered from the grove,
And yesterday to thee is as to-morrow
And there is none to speak to thee of love,
Then sing these songs one made thee long ago,
And men shall swear
Thou still art fair—
Yet shall not know.

SONG.—IF WE HAD MET

If we had met when leaves were green,
And fate to us less hard had proved,
And naught had been of what has been,
We might have loved as none have loved.

If we had met as girl and boy,
The world of pleasure at our feet,
Our joy had been a perfect joy ;
We might have met, but did not meet.

Nor less in youth's full passionate day,
A woman you and I a man,
We might have loved and found a way
No laws could check, no vows could ban.

Too late ! Too sad ! A year ago,
Even then perhaps, in spite of fate
It might have been,—but ah ! not now,
I dare not love you, 'tis too late.

SONG.—IF I HAD KNOWN YOU

IF I had known you—oh, if I had known you !
In other days when youth and love were strong,
I would have raised a temple to enthrone you
On some fair pinnacle of cloudless song.

If you had touched me then with your dear laughter,
As now its echo smites me in my grief,
I would have given my soul to you, and after
Lived in my love, grown old in my belief.

If you had loved me,—oh, you would have loved me !
Earth would have worshipped us, its seers sublime,
My song had been a psalm, and Saints had proved me
Prophet and priest, your poet for all time.

SONG.—BUTTERFLIES

O CHILD of Joy ! What idle life is thine !
Thou, in these meadows, while thy skies are blue,
And while thy joys are new to thee like wine,
Chasest mad butterflies as children do.
And lo, thou turnest from them to repine,
Because it was not love thou didst pursue.

O child of Hope ! Thou sighest thy sad sighs,
Mourning for that which is not nor can be.
Where is the noon can match with thy sunrise ?
Whose is the heart shall win thy constancy ?
Thou, with thy foolish loves, mad butterflies,
What dost thou ask of my sad heart and me ?

O child of Love, begotten for man's bliss !
O child of Pleasure, nursed for thy own pain !
Needs must I weep the day of thy distress,
The fate that brushes at thy arm in vain,
Thy skies of blue, thy broken happiness,
The hopes thou chasest never to attain.

SONG.—NOT A WORD

Love, my heart is faint with waiting,
Faint with hope and joy deferred,
All night long at this sad grating,
Sleepless like a prisoned bird,
Singing low,
Singing slow :
Come, ah come, love.—Not a word !

Love, in vain for thee this token
Did I tie, poor silken cord,
To my window. See, 'tis broken
And the strands fly heavenward.
All are free,
All but me.
Come, ah come, love.—Not a word !

Lo, the first sad streak of morning
Cleaves the heaven like a sword.
Love, too late I hear the warning,
Of thy footstep on the sward.
Yet, ah yet,
Though 'tis late,
Come ; but mind, love, not a word !

SONG.—YOU HAVE LET THE BEAUTY OF
THE DAY GO OVER

You have let the beauty of the day go over,
You have let the glory of the noon go by.
Clouds from the West have gathered close and cover
All but a remnant now of our proud sky.

Dumbly the rain beats on our darkened faces.
Hushed are the woods. Alas, for us no bird
Shall sing to-day of pleasure in green places,
No touch shall thrill, no soul of leaves be stirred.

Why did we wait ? What faith was ours in fortune ?
What was our pride that fate should kneel to us ?
Oh, we were fools. Love loves not to importune,
And he is silent here in this sad house.

Alas, dear love, the day for us is ended,
The pleasure of green fields, of streams, of skies.
One hour remains, one only of joy blended
With coming night. Ah, seize it ere it flies.

Draw fast the curtains. Close the door on sorrow.
Shut out the dusk. It only makes us grieve.
Here we may live a life;—and then, to-morrow,
If fate still wills it, we may take our leave.

A DREAM

I DREAMED
A dream of you,
Not as you seemed
When you were late unkind

And blind
To my eyes' pleading for a debt long due,
But touched and true
And all inclined
To tenderest fancies on love's inmost theme.
How sweet you were to me and ah, how kind
In that dear dream !

I felt
Your lips on mine
Mingle and melt,
And your cheek touch my cheek.
I, weak
With vain desires and askings for a sign
Of love divine,
Found my grief break,
And wept and wept in an unending stream
Of sudden joy set free, yet could not speak,
Dumb in my dream.

I knew
You loved me then,
And I knew too
The bliss of souls in Heaven
New-shriven,
Who look with pity on still sinning men,
And turn again
To be forgiven
In the dear arms of their God holding them,
And spend themselves in praise from morn till even
Nor break their dream.

I woke
In my mid bliss,
At midnight's stroke,
And knew you lost and gone.

Forlorn
I called you back to my unfinished kiss,
But only this
One word of scorn
You answered me, " 'Twas better loved to seem
Than loved to be, since all love is forsworn,
Always a dream."

LOVE AFTER SORROW

BEHOLD, this hour I love, as in the glory of morn.
I too, the accursèd one, whom griefs pursue
Like phantoms through a land of deaths forlorn,
Have felt my heart leap up with courage new.

Behold, I love. The tragedy of hate's derision
Has like a storm-cloud vanished and is done.
High in its path my hope has burst its prison
And stands transfigured, a resplendent sun.

Where are the ghosts of sorrow that beset my road,
The foes that mocked, the fools that fled from me ?
Peace be their portion all who sought my blood.
I care not for fear's bondage who am free.

O days of youth renewed ! Love's voice, a singing bird's,
Thrills me to tears more sweet than laughter are.
His silence godlike speaks to me in words
Dearer than minstrelsy in lands afar.

These halls, e'erwhile of pride, my sorrow's palaces,
Are decked for joy, and with high pomps and shows
Proclaim his lordship of all life that is
In passionate echoes of remembered vows.

The gardens are grown thick once more with scent of flowers

Moss-roses by the wall, sweet lavenders,
Larkspurs, red lilies. Who shall tell what dowers
Of musks and mallows golden shall be hers ?

Hers ? Whose ? Oh, if a tongue should tell of dreams
unwise

And love might blazon love to ears abroad,
How would I speak ! But let this word suffice,
That to my lips one name leaps like a sword,

And that I live once more and love all sentient things,
The spirit of the Earth, and the Sun's fire,
And the night's silence and hushed wanderings,
And her who is the soul of my desire.

THE SOUL'S MUTINY

I saw a galley passing to the West,
Its silken sails aglow as if with blood,
When the red sun dropped down into his nest,
And hurled his level spears across the flood.
And at its prow a mighty woman stood
With braided locks of blackest ebony,
While from the thick-fringed eyes her haughty mood
Flashed forth in all disdainful majesty.

For she was tall and vested like a queen,
And from her shoulders in imperial fold
A striped tunic, wrought of black and green
With strange device of dragons manifold,
Fell to her waist and rippled o'er with gold,
Where caught up in a girdle loosely bound,
Then freely down in potent masses rolled
And clung about her feet and clasped the ground.

And ever and anon, with gracious smile,
Lighting the royal sculpture of her face,
She gave commands. And each his joyful toil
Plied at her word, and with redoubled grace
Bent to his oar, and working still in place
Did all her bidding. And the ship moved on
As one which, waged in a mighty race,
Sailed surely to the front and surely won.

And next I saw a slender child who seemed
Sprung from the river god's unearthly dew,
And in his face the light of wisdom gleamed
And round about in flashing circles flew.
And he arose and whispered to the few
Who sat beside him, and to each in turn
He told his counsel thus to all the crew
In honied words which I had wished to learn.

And at his voice each rower dropped his oar,
And the sail flapped unguided on the mast,
And discord rose, the while upon the shore
Drifted the galley down the current fast.
And she who stood upon the prow had cast
Her angry words upon the storm in vain,
Though her deep tones came pealing down the blast
As though the heavens should be rent in twain.

And then I marked her, when she first espied
The fair child which had made this harm to be.
There was great wonder mingled with her pride
That one so tenderly designed as he
Should dare dispute with her old mastery.
And yet nor anger nor proud looks might quell
The fearless eyes which smiled out mutiny,
Till her own heart seemed stricken with the spell,

With wonderment fast quickening to dismay,
And a dull rage which smouldered 'neath her brows.
And then rage, wonder, pride did fade away
Before the cruel thought which lastly rose
From out her mad heart with colossal throes,
A thought so heavy-black that I did guess
It came full freighted with the immortal woes
Of an old god dethroned and heavenless.

For, sudden, with a shout, her arms she threw
High o'er her head, a torch in either hand,
And round the ship the flames triumphant flew,
The shrivelling sails fell low, while still she fanned
With tempest voice the leaping fire which spanned
The sinking galley with an arch of flame.
I heard her thunder forth her last command
And bid the traitors perish in their shame.

The ship went down, and a sad cry arose,
Stifled with smoke and rushing waters in.
The silent stream, as heedless of men's woes,
Went on its way as they had never been.
The brave ship rots upon the ooze, I ween,
And naked limbs lie stark upon the shore,
Long ripples lap that angry-hearted queen
And wash those mutinous eyes for evermore.

SONG.—THINK NO MORE OF ME

THINK no more of me,
If we needs must part.
Mine was but a heart.
Think no more of me.

Think no more of me.
For Love's sake forget.
Love grows hard which cannot see,
It may wound us yet.

Think no more of me.
Love has had his day.
Now Love runs away.
Think no more of me.
Think no more of me.
If we loved or not
Hidden is 'twixt me and thee.
It were best forgot.

Think no more of me.
We shall need our tears
For the coming years.
Think no more of me.
Think no more of me.
In the world above
Sadder far it were if we
Met and did not love.

SONG.—COME WITH THE SUMMER LEAVES

Come with the summer leaves, love, to my grave,
And, if you doubt among the quiet dead,
Choose out that mound where greenest grasses wave
And where the flowers grow thickest and most red.

Come in the morning while the dews of night,
Which are fair Nature's tears in darkness shed,
Rim the sad petals nor are garnered quite,
Like my lost hopes untimely harvested.

Come to my grave—ah gather, love, those flowers
Out of my heart they grow for your dear head.
These are its songs unwritten and all yours,
The love I loved you with and left unsaid.

THE EVICTION

UNRULY tenant of my heart,
Full fain would I be quit of thee.
I've played too long a losing part.
Thou bringest me neither gold nor fee.

'Tis time thou shouldst thy holding yield,
Thy will and mine no longer meet.
With cockle hast thou sowed my field,
With squanderings all the public street.

Thy presence doth disturb my pride.
Let me be owner' of my own.
I fling thee, with thy goods outside
And bar re-entry with a stone.

Begone and hide thee from my face.
I will not see thee chiding there.
Away, to live in my disgrace!
Away, to die in thy despair!

O impotence of human wit!
The law is mine, the fault in thee,
And yet in vain I serve the writ,
In vain I scourge thee with decree.

For lo, in stillness of the night,
O'erturning stone and guard and door,
Thou art come with thy lost tenant-right
And hast possession as before.

GOOD-BYE

FOOLS ! must we ever quarrel with our fate,
Too late
Reading the worth of what we did despise,
And wise
At the journey's end to weep it scarce begun
When done ?

No more ! 'Tis ever the same story told
As of old.
Children, we used to wish our childhood past :
At last
It ended, as this journey ends, and we
Are free.

Shall we lament ? It were an idle tale
To wail.
Can we be wise ? Oh wisdom comes too late,
And fate
Answers our wicked prayer for liberty :
“ Good-bye.”

WRITTEN AT SEA

WHAT is my quarrel with thee, beautiful sea,
That thus I cannot love thy waves or thee,
Or hear thy voice but it tormenteth me ?

Why do I hate thee, who art beautiful
Beyond all beauty, when the nights are cool,
And the stars fade because the moon is full ?

Why do I hate thee ? Thou art new and young,
And life is thine for loving, and thy tongue
Hath tones that I have known and loved and sung.

Thou hast a smile which would my smiling greet ;
Thy brave heart beateth as my own doth beat,
And thou hast tears which should be true and sweet.

Thou art a creature, strong and fair and brave,
Such as I might have given the world to have
And love and cherish ;—and thou art my slave.

I have my home in thee. Thy arms enfold
Me all night long, and I am rocked and rolled,
And thou art never weary of thy hold.

Thou art a woman in thy constancy,
And worthy better love than mine could be ;
And yet, behold, I cannot suffer thee.

If thou wert dumb ; if thou wert like the sky,
Which has not learned to speak our misery
In any voice less rude than the wind's cry ;

If thou wert wholly young and didst not know
The secret of our ancient human woe,
Or if thou knewest it wholly as I know ;

Or yet if thou wert old with all these years ;
If thou wert dull to hopes and loves and fears ;
If thou wert blind and couldst not see our tears ;

If thou wert bounded by some rocky shore,
And hadst not given thyself thus wholly o'er
To our poor single selves with all thy store ;

If thou wert not in thy immensity,
A single circle circling with the sky,
Where we must still be centies changelessly ;

If thou wert other than thou art ; * alas,
If thou wert not of water, but a mass
Of formless earth, a waveless plain of grass ;

If thou wert shapeless as the mountains are ;
If thou wert clad in some discordant wear ;
If thou wert not so blue and trim and fair ;

If thou wert decked with towns and villages ;
If there was heard, across the silent seas,
The music of church bells upon the breeze ;

If thou wert this ; or if thou wert not near,
But I could only sit apart and hear
The beating of thy waves, and find it drear,

But wild and quite unknown, and far from me ;
Sea, if thou couldst no longer be the sea,
Then I could love thee as thou lovest me.

If thou wouldst have me love thee, beautiful sea,
Build up a wall of dark 'twixt thee and me ;
Let me not see thee ; call the night to thee.

League with the winds ; rise up, and send them driven
To roll mad clouds about thy back at even.
Make thee a desolation of the heaven.

Thou shouldst compel me, with thy angry voice,
To choose 'twixt death and thee ; and, at the choice,
If my cheek grew not pale, thou might'st rejoice,

And I might love thee, oh thou monstrous sea ;
But now I cannot love thy waves or thee,
Or bear thy beauty in my misery.

A DAY IN THE CASTLE OF ENVY

THE castle walls are full of eyes,
And not a mouse may creep unseen.
All the window slits are spies ;
And the towers stand sentinel
High above the gardens green.
Not a lizard lurking close
In the brambles of the dell ;
Not a beetle as he goes,
Toiling in the dust, may tell
The least secret of his woes
To the idle butterflies ;
Not a privet moth may flit,
But the castle looketh wise,
But the old king knoweth it.

All day long the garden gates
Open stand for who will in,
For the old king loveth well
The reek of human loves and hates.
Most of all he loveth sin,
All that sendeth souls to Hell ;
All that hath the earthy smell
Of a joy that soon shall die.
And he sitteth there and saith :
“ Every creature that hath breath
Goeth with the taint of death.”

There he waiteth overhead,
Spieth out what he may spy,

Like an evil-omened gled.
From the morning till the night,
There is nothing which doth move,
There is nothing which can lie
Still and hidden out of sight,
But he seeth it above,
But he feeleth all the pleasure
Of its basking in the sun.
And his wisdom taketh measure
Of the sorrow which shall come
When the summer days are done.
Life and love are quickly run.
So he watcheth silently,
Waiting till the end shall be.

There he sitteth at the dawn
When the world begins to rouse ;
And the daisies on the lawn
Open wide their stainless eyes ;
Then he feeleth as in pain
For the wrinkles on his brows.
He doth envy the sunrise,
That it maketh all things gay ;
And his jealous ear hath heard
The first piping of a bird ;
And he curseth at the day.
But his curses are in vain
For the world grows young again.

From the shadow of the rocks,
Stealing out and stealing in,
Creeps the hungry foot-pad fox,
On the wild fowls nestled close.
Then a weirdly smile and thin
Curleth on his lip and nose,
As the red beast winds the flocks.

And there is an evil mirth,
In the glitter of his eye ;
For the sun hath warmed the earth,
And he seeth something stir
In the grass and then awake,
Turn and stretch her stealthily ;
And he hisseth at the snake,
As the heat unfoldeth her.

There he bideth through the noon,
While the pine tops clash together,
Till deep silence, like a tune,
Wrappeth all the earth and air :
And the old king dreamily
Noddeth his great heron feather,
As he sitteth in his chair.
For sleep cometh upon all,
Rock and castle, flower and tree :
And the turrets wave and quiver ;
And the battlemented wall
Bendeth in the 'haze of noon,
And the fir-cones one by one,
Split like thunder in the heat ;
And the old king hearing it,
Saith, " It is the angry sun."

But, as noontide slowly wears,
From the hollows underneath
Solemn ravens cross in pairs,
Drop a hollow croak and pass,
Which the king, who listeneth,
Readeth for the name of Death.
And he mocketh at the sound,
Croaketh back a croak as hoarse :
For he knoweth they are bound

To the dell where, on the grass,
There is that which was a corse.

Suddenly a merry noise
In the garden makes him glad,
For he knoweth well what joys
Noise and merriment shall bring.
They are children come to tread
The young daisies on the head ;
And he loveth well their play,
For they take the butterflies
And they tear them wing from wing ;
And the old king looketh wise
At the footstep on the bed.
And the broken myrtle spray ;
And he readeth all the lies
Which their innocence shall tell.
Well it pleaseth him such eyes
Should have learned the speech of Hell.

But at evening, lovers walk
Underneath the ilex trees ;
And the king hath heard their talk,
And the vows which they have spoken ;
And he knoweth too the tale
Of the vows which they have broken,
And the name and history,
And the secret which doth lie
Underneath their smiling pale ;
And the hidden tale of sorrow
Of the maiden as she goes,
And the pleasures she doth borrow,
That her grief may learn to die.
And he laugheth at her woes
As his red eye reads the scrawl
Love once wrote upon the wall,

Love grown cold, whose tasting is
Like the last lees of a kiss.

Thus he sitteth till the sun
Sendeth out long shadows slant
Till the fish-tanks down beneath
Hidden lie in vapour dun ;
And the castle rising gaunt
Slowly stretcheth out its limbs,
Like a drowsy-headed Hun.
But when all is deep in shade,
And the broad sun on the sea
Lieth on his flaming bed,
Twisteth, writheth in agony,
Like a wizard fiery clad,
Tortured and about to die,
Then the old king goeth mad.

And he curseth loud thereat ;
Curseth at the setting sun ;
Curseth at the coming night ;
Curseth at the flitting bat,
And the stars which cannot see ;
Curseth at the pale moonrise,
And her solemn mockery
Of a daylight which is done ;
Thinketh, though he should curse the skies,
Every hour till night is gone
Naught his curses may devise
For the pale moon's sorceries,
Or the darkness which shall be.
This the thought which tortureth him
That, for all he watcheth close,
Though his eyes be bright alway,
And, for all that he is king,

All the knowledge of all he knows
Telleth not what night may bring,
Telleth not what steps may stray.

Then he sendeth forth a scout, .
Biddeth shut the garden gate :
And there is a sudden rout
Of the children and the lovers
Whom the warder's eye discovers
In the twilight lurking late,
Lovers who are loath to part.
But their prayers avail them not,
And the maiden's witching pout
Cannot melt the warder's heart.
Straightway he hath turned them out.
For along the castle wall
Go the archers stout and tall,
And the king, who sitteth still,
In the darkness of the tower,
Waiteth till the seneschal,
With his stalwart serving-men,
Bear him out against his will
In his chair, while curses shower.

To the banquet he is borne,
While the cracked bell tolleth slow.
And the king doth beat his breast
Slowly to that chime forlorn ;
Beateth on his beard of snow,
First in anger then in jest,
First in mirth and then in scorn ;
Singeth low, " Ring bravely, bell,
For thy voice is loud and dry.
Such a tongue as thine is good
To out-talk the chimes of Hell.

Laugh we bravely, thou and I,
While the world is in laughing mood.
We may live to laugh its knell."

A BALLAD OF THE HEATHER

WE spent a day together,
One day of all our lives,
Of love in cloudless weather—
Such only youth contrives—
One day in the red heather,
Alone with our two lives.

The tall grey rocks were near us,
The birch-trees lent us shade,
The moorfowl did not fear us,
Nor was the fox afraid.
No other life was near us
Of matron, man or maid.

The glory of the morning
Had made our pulses beat,
The dangers we were scorning,
The pleadings of retreat,
Her mother's eyes of warning,
The foes that we might meet.

Earth's silence was our token,
The sunlight on the hill.
We whispered things unspoken,
We stopped and gazed our fill.
The stillness was not broken,
Save thus at our own will.

We sat down by the water,
A green and quiet place.
She ate what I had brought her
When she had said her grace.
She was Eve's fairest daughter.
I kneeled and kissed her face.

O Love, what deeds thou darest, "
When truth is on thy lips !
What royal robes thou wearest !
What wealth is in thy ships !
What glories thou declarest
With thy mad finger-tips !

We called on the high Heaven
In witness of our troth,
From morning until even,
While time was little loath
To give and be forgiven
The dear love in us both.

Aloft the raven scouting
Gave warning to the glen.
We heard a sound of shouting
The tramp of angry men.
No time was there for doubting,
And I was one to ten.

I hid her in the braken,
A brood-bird on its nest.
She wept as one forsaken
And held me to her breast.
We dared not thus be taken.
I fled, for it was best.

They passed her by unheeded.
They hunted me in sight.
I lured them while she needed,
A lapwing feigning flight.
Then o'er the hills I speeded
And left them to the night.

Alas, dear love, together
No more in all our lives
Shall we in cloudless weather,
Outwitting maids and wives,
Take joy of the red heather
And love and our two lives.

ON THE WAY TO CHURCH

THERE is one I know. I see her sometimes pass
In the morning streets upon her way to Mass,
A calm sweet woman with unearthly eyes.
Men turn to look at her, but ever stop,
Reading in those blue depths the death of hope
And a wise chastisement for thoughts unwise.

Pure is her brow as of a marble Saint.
Her brown hair pencils it with ripples faint.
There is no shadow on it and no light.
Her cheeks are pale like lilies in eclipse.
Hardly a little redness on her lips
Paints the sad smile where all the rest is white.

Tall is she and bent forward like a reed
Which the wind toys with as she walks with speed
Girl-like her limbs and virginal her waist.

Of the world's wonders there is none so sweet
As this, the summer lightning of her feet,
Speeding her onward like a fawn in haste.

What is her secret ? All the world has tried
To guess it. One I knew in guessing died
And was no wiser for his mortal pain.
Each has turned sadder from the thankless quest,
And gone back silent, even if he guessed,
Knowing all answer would be counted vain.

I knew her once. I know her not to-day.
Our eyes meet sometimes, but hers turn away
Quicker from mine than from the rest that look.
Her pale cheek quivers, a flush comes and goes,
As in the presence of a soul that knows,
And her hands tighten on her missal book.

Men have done evil yet have won to Heaven,
Lived in blood guiltiness yet died forgiven.
May I not, I too, one day win my grace ?
Ah no. The sacrilege of this worst sin
Outweighs all grace. I dare not enter in
Nor kneel, God's robber, near that angel face.

GIACINTA

GIACINTA sat upon the garden wall
Among the autumn lilies, and let fall
Their crimson petals on her lover's head,
And laughed because her little hands were red.
She was the fairest child of Italy,
And it was well the lilies thus should die.

And do not cry to the unheeding skies
'Did I not love her?' See, I hate your love
More than I hate yourself."

And Giulio strove
With his weak heart and could not bear the pain.
And so he took Giacinta's hand again,
Without more word. But she in softened mood
Looked on the boy her beauty had subdued,
And said "Poor Giulio! I have never shown
Much hate to you, and this you needs must own,
Only beware of loving me. 'Tis strange
That men are wise, yet cannot take the range
Of a silly woman's mind, but still devise
Of their fool's love, as if it were the prize
For which a woman might forget the cost
Of her undoing and a world well lost,
And cannot see that love is only this,
A pretty word to whisper in a kiss,
As when one says, 'God bless you' with 'Good-night.
But Giulio, who would ever suffer it
A man should always have the name of God
Upon his lips?"

Her lover only trod
The lilies with his heel. At last he sighed,
"And Simon loved you, and for this he died?"

They sat till dusk upon the garden wall,
And she began to sing a madrigal
About the falling leaves and quite forgot
To answer him. But Giulio heeded not
Because he held her hand. He could not flee.
She was the fairest child of Italy.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

AN old heart's mourning is a hideous thing,
And weeds upon an aged weeper cling
Like night upon a grave. The city there,
Gaunt as a woman who has once been fair,
Lay black with winter, and the silent rain
Fell thro' the heavens darkly, like a stain
Upon her face. The dusky houses rose,
Unlovely shapes laid naked on the ooze,
Grimed with long sooty tears. The night fell down,
And gathered all the highways in its frown.
This was my home.

I saw men pass and pass
Nor stop to look into a neighbour's face.
I dared not look in their's because my eyes
Were faint and travel-jarred and would not rise
From the dull earth, and hunger made them dim,
The hunger of a seven years' angry dream
Of love and peace and home unsatisfied.
And now my heart thus grievously denied
Rose, like a caged bird in the nesting time
Who beats against the bars that prison him,
In all its greenness of youth's wounds and pain
And would not cease till these should bleed again.

For I had gone a hunter through the world,
And set my tent in every land, and hurled
My spears at life because my joys were dead ;
And many a fair field of the Earth was red
Where I had passed, and many a wind might tell
Of stricken souls that to my arrows fell.
I would not stop to listen to their cries
But went my way and thought that I was wise.

A wanderer's life, whether his lone chase be man
Or only those poor outlaws under ban
The creatures of the field his hand destroys
Through rage of wantonness or need of noise,
Is the fierce solace of its anger given
To a hurt soul which dares not turn to Heaven.
With me it was a vengeance of love lost,
A refuge proved for passions tempest-tossed,
An unguent for despairs that could not kill.
I wandered in the desert and the hill
Seeking dry places, and behold my grief
Fled with my footprints and I found relief.
And it had happened to me, as befalls
Men bred in cities who have left their walls
For gain or pleasure, that the wilderness
Grew lastly wearisome. I loved it less.

And once a desperate chase had led me on
To an unknown land when daylight was near done,
And I sat weary by my slaughtered prey
And watched the cranes which northward fled away
Rank upon rank into the depths of air,
And still the horizon lifeless vast and bare
Stretched wide around, and like a vault of dread
The arch of heaven hemmed me overhead,
And the great eye of the dead beast was set
Upon my own. I felt my cheek was wet.
Oh surely then, for all man's heart be hard,
Though he have taken Nature by the beard
And lived alone as to the manner born,
And though his limbs be strung with toil, and worn
To all Earth's dangers, yet at such a time
His coward soul will overmaster him,
Saying "Beware, thou child of Earth, even now
Look at the world how wide it is and thou

How small ! And thou hast dared to be alone.”
And lo, the last long flight of cranes was gone,
And darkness with its folding pity crept
Over the plain. I hid my face and wept,
Till sleep fell on me. But, when dawn was come,
I turned my steps to what had been my home.

The palace gardens ! I had fled aside
From the gaunt streets in easement of my pride
After the lamps were lit, for to my brain
The tumult and the passers-by were pain :
The gardens where in those far summer times
A boy I came to watch the pantomimes
Among a laughing crowd of white-capped *bonnes*
And red-cheeked children and loud country clowns,
Or where, along the wall in graver sense
And screened from winds in their *petite Provence*,
With the first chestnut blossoms old men sat
And cheered their melancholy souls with chat,
Thawing like frozen apples in the sun !
The old men and the children all were gone.
The leaves, their canopy, lay torn and dead
And crushed in spongy heaps beneath my tread.
The fountains recreant to their laughter lay
Murk pools of silence shrouded from the day,
As though no doves had ever at their brink
Stooped in full June to plume themselves and drink.
Only the trees stood, witness of the past.
Sad trees, I greeted them. I held them fast
Like a friend's hands. They were as changed and bare
As my own life, but calm in the despair
Of their long winter's martyrdom, and I
A very child in my philosophy !
Till I remembered that no Spring would come
To mock the winter of my own long doom

With any merriment. And "Trees" I cried,
"Your hearts within are all too greenly dyed
To match with mine." I let their branches go
And sat upon a bench to feed my woe
With memories long hidden out of mind,
But which trooped back that night and rode the wind.

These wooden benches, what sad ghosts of pleasures
Had used them nightly crouching o'er their treasures,
My own long murdered joys, since there we sat
Blind in our love and insolent to Fate!
Each one a witness proved of our lost vows,
Our prayers, our protests, all our souls' carouse;
Each one inscribed through the unheeding years
With letters of a name I wrote in tears.
'Twas here I saw her first, a pure sweet woman
Fair as a goddess but with smile all human,
Her children at her knees who went and came
At each new wayward impulse of their game,
And she reproving with her quiet eyes
Veiling the mirth they could not all disguise.
The echo of her voice with its mute thrill
Lived in these glades and stirred my pulses still,
Though I had lived to hear it in what tone
Of passionate grief and souls' disunion.
She stood, a broken lily, by that tree,
Sunlight and shade for ever changingly
Chequering the robe she wore of virgin white,
When first I touched the goal of my delight
Her woman's hand and hid it in my hands.
Here shone the glory of her countenance
Nobler for tears when weakness for a space
Held full dominion in that heaven her face
And she confessed herself of grief divine
And love grown young, a vintage of new wine,

And I was crowned her king. O silent trees,
You heard it and you know how to the lees
We drained the cup of life and found it good,
Gathering love's manna for our daily food,
In scorn of the vain rest. You heard and knew
What the world only guessed where all was true.
And have you dreamed on in your quiet grove
While seven years were built against our love!

'Twas on this bench I sat that day of June
Thinking of death a whole sweet afternoon,
Till I was sick of sorrow and my tongue
Weary of its long silence (I was young
And the birds sang so loud); and when the night
Came as it now came, and the lamps grew bright
In the long street, lit like a diamond chain,
I rose and said: "I will not bear the pain.
What is my pride worth that for it this smart
Should harrow up the green things of my heart
For twelve importunate hours in such a sort?
And pleasure is so sweet and life so short."
And as a martyr, who long time has lain
Frozen in a dungeon, sees amid his pain,
When he has fasted on for many days,
Bright visions of hot feasts and hearths ablaze
With welcome, and who sells his gloomy creed,
And is overcome of pleasure, so my need
Conquered my pride; and I arose and went
Striding, with smiles at my new found intent,
Down these same gravel alleys to the gate
And so beyond, like one inebriate,
Thinking the while of the brave baths and food
Set for the renegade, until I stood
Once more before her door I had forsworn.
I did not stop to question thoughts forlorn.

But knocked as I had knocked a thousand times.
St. Roch's was ringing its last evening chimes,
And I still thought about the martyr's dream.
I saw the light within the threshold gleam
Which opened to me, and the voice I knew
Said in all sweetness, as the door swung to,
"Come. We are just in time. How fortunate
You too like me have happened to be late."
I swear I said no word of the sad plans
I had plotted on this bench of ignorance.
There have been kings called happy, but not one
As I that night. Ah God! to be alone,
Alone, and never more to hear her voice
Calling me back, blest martyr, to my joys!

I sat there grieving in the cold and rain
Until my heart had half forgot its pain,
And when I rose I scarce could guide my feet,
They were so numb, to the unlovely street.
And yet need was, my steps should bear me on
To some mad corner of that Babylon;
And I must feed the gnawings of my soul
With broken meat. "The seven years may roll,"
I said, "and men may change and she be dead,
Yet the house stands, God knows how tenanted."

I leaned my head against the colonnade
Which skirts the square. I think I had not prayed
Through all those years, but now I said a prayer,
And hope in spite of reason seemed to wear
Green buds upon its branches. Who shall know
If 'twas a vision sent me in my woe
To prove the power of prayer? But, when I turned
And looked across the square, the candles burned

In the old upper windows, and, before,
A shadow crossed the curtain, and the door
Opened towards me, and a voice there cried
"Come. You are just in time." I put out wide
My arms into the darkness, and I fell.

When I awoke, 'twas as one passed from Hell
Who fears and feels no longer. I was tired.
I scarcely cared to know when I inquired
After the house. The girl who held the glass
To my lips (a flower-girl it seemed she was)
Told me that house and square alike were gone
Swept by new boulevards to oblivion.
Why should I grieve? The new was worth the old.
I listened to the story as 'twas told,
And lingered with her all the evening there
Because she pitied me and she was fair,
And held me with her hand upon the latch.
"Seven years," I said, "it is a long night's watch
For any soul alone upon life's way,
And mine is weary at the break of day."

FROM THE ARABIC

FROM THE ARABIC

I

THE CAMEL-RIDER

THERE is no thing in all the world but love,
No jubilant thing of sun or shade worth one sad tear.
Why dost thou ask my lips to fashion songs
Other than this, my song of love to thee ?

See where I lie and pluck the thorns of grief,
Dust on my head and fire, as one who mourns his slain.
Are they not slain, my treasures of dear peace ?
This their red burial is, sand heaped on sand.

Here came I in the morning of my joys.
Before the dawn was born, through the dark downs I rode.
The low stars led me on as with a voice,
Stars of the scorpion's tail in the deep South.

Sighing I came, and scattering wide the sand.
No need had I to urge her speed with hand or heel,
The creature I bestrode. She knew my haste,
And knew the road I sought, the road to thee.

Jangling her bells aloud in wantonness,
And sighing soft, she too, her sighs to my soul's sighs.
Behind us the wind followed thick with scents
Of incense blossoms and the dews of night.

The thorn trees caught at us with their crook'd hands ;
The hills in blackness hemmed us in and hid the road ;
The spectres of the desert howled and warned ;
I heeded nothing of their words of woe.

Thus till the dawn I sped in my desire,
Breasting the ridges, slope on slope, till morning broke ;
And lo !, the sun revealed to me no sign,
And lo ! the day was widowed of my hope.

Where are the tents of pleasure and dear love,
Set in the Vale of Thyme, where winds in Spring are fain ?
The highways of the valley, where they stood
Strong in their flocks, are there. But where are they ?

The plain was dumb, as emptied of all voice ;
No bleat of herds, no camels roaring far below
Told of their presence in the pastures void,
Of the waste places which had been their homes.

I climbed down from my watch-tower of the rocks,
To where the tamarisks grow, and the dwarf palms, alarmed.
I called them with my voice, as the deer calls,
Whose young the wolves have hunted from their place.

I sought them in the foldings of the hill,
In the deep hollows shut with rocks, where no winds blow.
I sought their footstep under the tall cliffs,
Shut from the storms, where the first lambs are born.

The tamarisk boughs had blossomed in the night,
And the white broom which bees had found, the wild bees'
brood.

But no dear signal told me of their life,
No spray was torn in all that world of flowers.

Where are the tents of pleasure and dear love,
For which my soul took ease for its delight in Spring,
The black tents of her people beautiful
Beyond the beauty of the sons of kings ?

The wind of war has swept them from their place,
Scattering them wide as quails, whom the hawk's hate
pursues ;
The terror of the sword importunate
Was at their backs, nor spared them as they flew.

The summer wind has passed upon their fields ;
The rain has purged their hearth-stones, and made smooth
their floors ;
Low in the valley lie their broken spears,
And the white bones which are their tale forlorn.

Where are the sons of Saba in the South,
The men of mirth and pride to whom my songs were sung,
The kinsmen of her soul who is my soul,
The brethren of her beauty whom I love ?

She mounted her tall camel in the waste,
Loading it high for flight with her most precious things ;
She went forth weeping in the wilderness,
Alone with fear on that far night of ill.

She fled mistrusting, as the wild roe flees,
Turning her eyes behind her, while fear fled before ;
No other refuge knew she than her speed,
And the black land that lies where night is born.

Under what canopy of sulphurous heaven,
Dark with the thunderclouds unloosing their mad tongues,
Didst thou lie down aweary of thy burden,
In that dread place of silence thou hadst won ?

Close to what shelter of what naked rocks,
Carved with what names of terror of what kings of old,
Near to what monstrous shapes unmerciful,
Watching thy death, didst thou give up thy soul ?

Or dost thou live by some forgotten well,
Waiting thy day of ransom to return and smile,
As the birds come when Spring is in the heaven,
And dost thou watch me near while I am blind ?

Blind in my tears, because I only weep,
Kindling my soul to fire because I mourn my slain,
My kindred slain, and thee, and my dear peace,
Making their burial thus, sand heaped on sand.

For see, there nothing is in all the world
But only love worth any strife or song or tear.
Ask me not then to sing or fashion songs
Other than this, my song of love to thee.

II

THE DESOLATE CITY

DARK to me is the earth. Dark to me are the heavens.

Where is she that I loved, the woman with eyes like stars ?

Desolate are the streets. Desolate is the city,

A city taken by storm, where none are left but the slain !

Sadly I rose at dawn, undid the latch of my shutters,

Thinking to let in light, but I only let in love.

Birds in the boughs were awake ; I listened to their
chaunting ;

Each one sang to his love ; only I was alone.

This, I said in my heart, is the hour of life and of pleasure,
Now each creature on earth has his joy, and lives in the
sun,
Each in another's eyes finds light, the light of compassion,
This is the moment of pity, this is the moment of love.

Speak, O desolate city ! Speak, O silence in sadness !
Where is she that I loved in my strength, that spoke to
my soul ?
Where are those passionate eyes that appealed to my eyes
in passion ?
Where is the mouth that kissed me, the breast I laid to
my own ?

Speak, thou soul of my soul, for rage in my heart is kindled.
Tell me, where didst thou flee on the day of destruction
and fear ?
See, my arms still enfold thee, enfolding thus all Heaven,
See, my desire is fulfilled in thee, for it fills the Earth.

Thus in my grief I lamented. Then turned I from the
window,
Turned to the stair, and the open door, and the empty
street,
Crying aloud in my grief, for there was none to chide me,
None to mock at my weakness, none to behold my tears.

Groping I went, as blind. I sought her house, my beloved's.
There I stopped at the silent door, and listened and tried
the latch.
Love, I cried, dost thou slumber ? This is no hour for
slumber,
This is the hour of love, and love I bring in my hand.

I knew the house, with its windows barred, and its leafless
fig-tree,

Climbing round by the doorstep the only one in the street ;
I knew where my hope had climbed to its goal and there
encircled

All that those desolate walls once held, my beloved's heart.

There in 'my grief she consoled me. She loved me when I
loved not.

She put her hand in my hand, and set her lips to my lips.
She told me all her pain and showed me all her trouble.

I, like a fool, scarce heard, hardly returned her kiss.

Love, thy eyes were like torches. They changed as I beheld
them.

Love, thy lips were like gems, the seal thou settest on
my life.

Love, if I loved not then, behold this hour thy vengeance ;

This is the fruit of thy love and thee, the unwise grown
wise.

Weeping strangled my voice. I called out, but none
answered ;

Blindly the windows gazed back at me, dumbly the door ;
She whom I love, who loved me, looked not on my yearning,

Gave me no more her hands to kiss, showed me no more
her soul.

Therefore the Earth is dark to me, the sunlight blackness,

Therefore I go in tears and alone, by night and day ;

Therefore I find no love in Heaven, no light, no beauty,

A Heaven taken by storm, where none are left but the
slain !

III

THE GRIEF OF LOVE

LOVE, I am sick for thee, sick with an absolute grief,
Sick with the thought of thy eyes and lips and bosom.
All the beauty I saw, I see to my hurt revealed.
All that I felt I feel to-day for my pain and sorrow.

Love, I would fain forget thee, hide thee in deeper night,
Shut thee where no thought is, in the grave with tears.
Love, I would turn my face to the wall and, if needs be, die ;
Death less cruel were than thy eyes which have blinded
me.

Since thou art gone from me, glory is gone from my life ;
Dumb are the woods and streams, and dumb the voice of
my soul ;
Dead are the flowers we loved, blackened and sere with
blight ;
Earth is frost-bound under my foot where our footsteps
trod.

Give me back for my sorrow the days of senseless peace,
Days when I thought not of thee, or thought in wisdom ;
Let me see thee once more as thou to my folly wert,
A woman senseless as sounding brass or as tinkling
cymbal.

Why didst thou show me thy heart, which I thought not of ?
Why didst thou bare me thy soul, who to me wert soulless ?
Why didst thou kiss my mouth, when my mouth did mock ?
Why didst thou speak to my lips of love, ere my lips had
spoken ?

Love, thou hast made me thine, thine, and in my despite,
 Laying thy hand on my heart in the soft Spring weather ;
 Love, thou hast bought my soul at a price, the price of thine,
 Never again to mock at love, ah, never, never !

IV

A LOVE SECRET

Love has its secrets, joy has its revealings.

How shall I speak of that which love has hid ?

If my beloved shall return to greet me,

Deeds shall be done for her none ever did.

My beloved loved me. How shall I reveal it ?

We were alone that morning in the street.

She looked down at the ground, and blushed, and trembled.

She stopped me with her eyes when these did meet.

“ What wouldst thou, sweet one ? What wouldst thou
 with sorrow,

Thou, the new morning star with me, the night ?

What are those flowers thou holdest to thy bosom ?

What are the thoughts thou hidest from my sight ? ”

“ Thine are these flowers,” she said, “ these foolish roses,
 And thine the thoughts, if thus it be thy will.

I hold them close for fear that thou shouldst mock me,
 I hold them to my heart for fear of ill.”

“ Nay, what of ill ? ’Tis only age is evil,

Only forgetfulness and grief and pain ;

What dost thou know of grief, that thou shouldst fear it ?

Mine is the grief who cannot love again.”

She raised her eyes, she looked at me in wonder,
“The ache is here,” she said, “by night and day ;
I cannot teach my heart to bear its burden,
I cannot turn my silence from its way.”

“Speak to me, child. I am thy wise physician,
A man acquainted with all grief can teach ;
There is no sorrow but has joy for sister,
No silence but finds counterpart in speech.”

My beloved laughed. She saw through my dissembling ;
She held to me her hand, that I might kiss,
The inside of her hand. 'Twas like a petal
Of her own roses, but more dear than this.

I felt its pulses, like a bird in prison ;
“Sweet child,” I said, “what wouldst thou I should
prove ?
I cannot make thee wiser than thy wisdom,
Who knowest all things since thou knowest love.”

How shall I tell it ? How shall I reveal it ?
I led her by the hand, as thus I said,
Back from the street to where it stood, my dwelling,
And closed the door on where it stood, my bed.

Her laughter stopped. “Nay, use not thou unkindly.
Thine is the hand to deal or spare the blame ;
I dare not be to thee thus uninvited,
Thou dost not know me, hast not learned my name.”

How shall I tell it ? How shall I reveal it ?
Love in that instant found its latest birth,
“Soul of my soul,” I cried, “thy name is Pleasure,
The sweetest thing to love on this sad Earth.”

I held her in my arms, I pressed her fastly.

“ Ah, if thou lovedst me indeed,” she cried.

“ I love thee, and I love thee,” was my answer,

“ My sister, my beloved one, my bride ! ”

Love has its secrets. Joy has its revealings.

I speak of this which love in vain has hid ;

If my beloved shall return to greet me,

Deeds shall be done for her none ever did.

V

THE DAYS OF OUR YOUTH

THESE are the days of our youth, our days of glory and honour.

Pleasure begotten of strength is ours, the sword in our hand.

Wisdom bends to our will, we lead captivity captive,

Kings of our lives and love, receiving gifts from men.

Why do I speak of wisdom ? The prize is not for the wisest.

Reason, the dull ox, ploughs a soil which no joy shall reap.

Folly is fleeter far 'neath the heel of the fearless rider,

Folly the bare-backed steed we bestride, the steed of the plains.

Mine is a lofty ambition, as wide as the world I covet.

Vast is the empire I claim for thee, thou spouse of my soul.

Show me new lands to win, and, by God in heaven, I swear it :

These shall be mine and thine to-night for all time to hold.

Time is our slave and Fortune's. We need not years for fruition.

Here in our hands behold a key which unlocks the world.
Each new day is a life. For us there is no to-morrow.

Love no yesterday knows nor we, but to-day is ours.

See, what a wealth I bring thee, what treasure of myrrh
and spices !

Every kingdom of Earth have I sacked to procure thee
gold.

All the knowledge that fools have learned at the feet of
women,

All that the wise have been taught in tears for thy sake
I know.

Give thyself up to Love. There is naught divine but
madness.

Give thyself up to me Love's priest in his inmost shrine.
Shut thy eyes on the world, sublime in thy abnegation.

Only the wise who have bowed their will shall receive
the prize.

Shut thy eyes on the light. I have nobler dreams to read
thee,

Here in the shades of this darkened room, than the sun
can show.

Is there not light in my eyes to-night more light than the
dreamlight ?

See it breaks in streams on thy face ; it illumines thy soul.

Let me persuade thy weakness. I sue thee here with my
reason.

Let me convince thee of love with my lips till thou cease
to think.

Let me enfold thee with words more sweet than the prayers
of angels,

Speaking thus with my hand on thy heart till it cease to
beat.

Let me assuage thy grief with laughter, thy fear with kisses.

Let me cajole thy doubts with surprise, thy pride with
tears.

Let me outshame the shame of thy face, outblush thy
blushes.

Let me teach thee what Love can dare and yet dream no
shame.

Let me uncover thy bosom and prove to thee its glory.

Let me preach to thee of thyself the live night long.

Let me chaunt new hymns to thy praise as I kneel and
worship,

Rising still like a god from my knees from eve till morn.

Let me discourse of love with my hands and lips and bosom.

Let me explain with my limbs the joy that a soul can feel.

Let me unveil to thy bodily sense thy god incarnate

Taking flesh in a visible form for thy body's need.

Lo, on the mount of Love, the holiest place of holies,

Incense and prayer and the people's shout and the fires
have risen.

Love descends on the feast. He mounts the pyre in silence,

Victim and priest and god in one, to thy dreams revealed.

There, the rite is accomplished. Whatever Love knows
thou knowest.

Sudden the victim staggers and falls. In the dust it lies.

See the hot blood flows for thy sake, it o'erflows the altar.

Dost thou not feel it stream in thy veins ? It still lives
in thee.

These are the days of our youth, the days of our dominion.

All the rest is a dream of death and a doubtful thing.

Here we at least have lived, for love is all life's wisdom,

Joy of joys for an hour to-day ; then away, farewell !

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR
TWELVE SONNETS FOR THE MONTHS

JANUARY

COVER SHOOTING

THE week at Whinwood next to Christmas week.

Six guns, no more, but all good men and true,
Of the clean-visaged sort, with ruddy cheek
Which knows not care. Light-hearted Montagu
At the cover's end, as down the wind they flew,
Has stopped his score of pheasants, every beak,
Without more thought of Juliet than of you ;
And still I hear his loud-mouthed Purdeys speak.

Tybalt and Paris, with a bet on hand,
Have fired at the same woodcock. "Truce," say I,
"To civil jars." For look, as by command,
Bunch following bunch, a hundred pheasants fly.
Now battle, murder, death on every side !
Right, left, left, right, we pile up agony,
Till night stops all. Then home in chastened pride,
With aching heads, our slaughter satisfied.

APRIL

TROUT-FISHING

THIS morning, through my window, half awake,
I felt the south wind blow ; and presently,
With a tumultuous thrill and then a shake,
The nightingale broke forth in melody.
I rose in haste, and looked at the grey sky,
And read an omen. From its corner next
A book I drew, blest book, where fly on fly
Are all the letters of its well-thumbed text.

I chose my cast, a march-brown and a dun,
And ran down to the river, chasing hope.
At the first throw a mighty trout was on,
A very Samson, fit to burst a rope,
Yet tamed by one sad hank of yielding hair
And Fate, the fisherman of King and Pope.
Upon the grass he lies, and gasps the air,
Four silver pounds, sublimely fat and fair.

MAY

THE LONDON SEASON

I STILL love London in the month of May,
By an old habit, spite of dust and din.
I love the fair adulterous world, whose way
Is by the pleasant banks of Serpentine.
I love the worshippers at fashion's shrine,
The flowers, the incense, and the pageantry
Of generations which still ask a sign
Of that dear god, whose votary am I.

I love the "greetings in the market-place,"
The jargon of the clubs. I love to view
The "gilded youth" who at the window pass,
For ever smiling smiles for ever new.
I love these men and women at their task
Of hunting pleasure. Hope, mysterious too,
Touches my arm and points, and seems to ask
"And you, have you no Juliet in the masque?"

JUNE

A DAY AT HAMPTON COURT

It is our custom, once in every year,
Mine and two others', when the chestnut trees
Are white at Bushey, Ascot being near,
To drive to Hampton Court, and there, at ease
In that most fair of English palaces,
Spend a long summer's day. What better cheer
Than the old "Greyhound's," seek it where you please?
And where a royal garden statelier?

The morning goes in tennis, a four set,
With George the marker. 'Tis a game for gods,
Full of return and volley at the net,
And laughter and mirth-making episodes
Not wholly classic. But the afternoon
Finds us punt-fishing idly with our rods,
Nodding and half in dreams, till all too soon
Darkness and dinner drive us back to town.

JULY

GOODWOOD

To the high breezes of the Goodwood Down
London has fled, and there awhile forgets
Its weariness of limb on lawns new-mown
And in green shadows all its wars and frets.
Thither we too will bring our calumets
In sign of peace restored o'er fashion slain,
Weaning our souls from folly with small bets
Of gloves and crowns with laughing ringwomen.

The sport is fair, luck fair, and Nature's face
Fairest of all. We neither make nor mar
A fortune here. Yet we were rich with less
Than this week's pleasure conquered from the year.
I would not for a million not have seen
Fred Archer finish upon Guinevere.
Hark! They are off again, a half mile spin,
Four of the dozen backed and bound to win.

AUGUST

ON THE THAMES

THE river Thames has many a dear delight
In summer days for souls which know not guile,
Or souls too careless of the vain world's spite
To heed its frowning while the heavens smile.
In boyhood all our pleasure was in toil,
As with bent backs we laboured at the oar ;
We loved to spend our strength in the turmoil
Of speed disputed, conquered, conqueror.

But other years brought other joys. Alas !
Where is fair Rosamund, our heart's first queen,
Whose foot so lightly trod with us the grass,
Though burdened with the hundred loves of men,
At Kew, at Skindle's ? But no more of this.
We still have joys, and still old Thames is green.
Still on his back we float awhile and press
His hand in hope, and call it happiness.

SEPTEMBER

FEAST OF ST. PARTRIDGE

THE only saint in all our calendar

Is good St. Partridge. 'Tis his feast to-day,
The happiest day of all a happy year,
And heralded as never yet was May.

The dawn has found us marshalled for the fray,
Striding the close-shorn stubbles ranked in line,
With lust of battle and with lust of play
Made glorious drunk as men are drunk with wine.

There go the coveys, forward birds and strong,

Bound for the mangold where they wheel and stop.
Now, steady, men, and bring the left along.

A fortune waits us in each turnip-top.
With a wild shriek, and then a whirr of wings,
The covey rises. Brace and brace they drop,
Joining the dead ranks of forgotten things
In glorious death, the fierce delight of kings.

OCTOBER

GAMBLING AT MONACO

A JEWELLED kingdom set impregnable
In gardens green which front the violet sea,
A happy fortress shut and guarded well,
And cradled ever on the mountain's knee :
Here Monsieur Blanc, sad prince of industry,
Has reared the palace which men call his hell :
And here in autumn days, when winds blow free,
Pleasure shall lead us to sin's citadel.

Alas for vice ! Yet, who dares moralize,
In the hushed rooms, where fortune reigns alway ?
Her solemn priest, with chink of coin, replies
" Messieurs, faites votre jeu. Le jeu est fait."
Who dares be wise, lest wisdom's self be vexed ?
For all who come to preach remain to play.
Nay, leave poor vice, say I, her pleasant text,
Nor grudge her Heaven in this world with the next.

NOVEMBER

ACROSS COUNTRY

NOVEMBER's here. Once more the pink we don,
And on old Centaur, at the coverside,
Sit changing pleasant greetings one by one
With friend and neighbour. Half the county's pride
Is here to-day. Squire, parson, peer, bestride
Their stoutest nags, impatient to be gone.
Here, schoolboys on their earliest ponies ride,
And village lads on asses, not out-done.

But hark ! That sounds like music. Ay, by God !
He's off across the fallow. " No, sirs, no ;
" Not yet a minute, just another rod !
" Then let him have it. Ho, there, tallyho ! "
Now that's worth seeing ! Look ! He's topped the wall,
Leaving his whole field pounded in a row.
A first flight place to-day was worth a fall.
So forward each, and Heaven for us all !

DECEMBER

AWAY TO EGYPT

ENOUGH, enough ! This winter is too rude,
Too dark of countenance, of tooth too keen.
Nature finds rebels now in flesh and blood,
And hearts grow sick for change and eyes for green.
Let us away ! What profits it that men
Are wise as gods, if winter holds its sway,
If blood be chilled, and numbness clasp the brain ?
Frost is too stubborn. Let us then away !

Away to Egypt ! There we may forget
All but the presence of the blessed sun.
There in our tents well-housed, sublimely set
Under a pyramid, with horse and gun,
We may make terms with Nature and, awhile,
Put as it were our souls to grass, and run
Barefooted and barehearted in the smile
Of that long summer which still girds the Nile.

GRISELDA

A SOCIETY NOVEL IN RHYMED VERSE

GRISELDA

CHAPTER I

AN idle story with an idle moral !
Why do I tell it, at the risk of quarrel
With nobler themes ? The world, alas ! is so,
And who would gather truth must bend him low,
Nor fear to soil his knees with graveyard ground,
If haply there some flower of truth be found.
For human nature is an earthy fruit,
Mired at the stem and fleshy at the root,
And thrives with folly's mixon best o'erlaid,
Nor less divinely so, when all is said.
Brave lives are lived, and worthy deeds are done
Each virtuous day, 'neath the all-pitying sun ;
But these are not the most, perhaps not even
The surest road to our soul's modern Heaven.
The best of us are creatures of God's chance
(Call it His grace), which works deliverance ;
The rest mere pendulums 'twixt good and ill,
Like soldiers marking time while standing still.
'Tis all their strategy, who have lost faith
In things Divine beyond Man's life and death,
Pleasure and pain. Of Heaven what know we
Save as unfit for angels' company,
Say rather Hell's ? We cling to sins confessed,
And say our prayers still hoping for the best.
We fear old age and ugliness and pain,
And love our lives, nor look to live again.

I do but parable the crowd I know,
The human cattle grazing as they go,
Unheedful of the heavens. Here and there
Some prouder, may-be, or less hungry steer
Lifting his face an instant to the sky,
And left behind as the bent herd goes by,
Or stung to a short madness, tossing wild
His horns aloft, and charging the gay field,
Till the fence stops him, and he vanquished too,
Turns to his browsing—lost his Waterloo.

The moral of my tale I leave to others
More bold, who point the finger at their brothers,
And surer know than I which way is best
To virtue's goal, where all of us find rest,
Whether in stern denial of things sweet,
Or yielding timely, lest life lose its feet
And fall the further.

A plain tale is mine
Of naked fact, uncoconscious of design,
Told of the world in this last century
Of Man's (not God's) disgrace, the XIXth. We
Have made it all a little as it is
In our own images and likenesses,
And need the more forgiveness for our sin.

Therefore, my Muse, impatient to begin,
I bid thee fearless forward on thy road.
Steer thou thy honest course 'twixt bad and good :
Know this, in art that thing alone is evil
Which shuns the one plain word that shames the Devil.
Tell truth without preamble or excuse,
And all shall be forgiven thee—all, my Muse !

In London then not many years ago
There lived a lady of high fashion, who
For her friends' sake, if any still there be
Who hold her virtues green in memory,
Shall not be further named in this true tale
Than as *Griselda* or the *Lady L.*
Such, if I err not, was the second name
Her parents gave when to the font she came,
And such the initial letter bravely set
On her coach door, beneath the coronet
Which bore her and her fortunes—bore, alas !
For, as in this sad world all things must pass,
However great and nobly framed and fair :
Griselda, too, is of the things that were.

But while she lived *Griselda* had no need
Of the world's pity. She was proudly bred
And proudly nurtured. Plenty her full horn
Had fairly emptied out when she was born,
And dowered her with all bounties. She was fair
As only children of the noblest are, .
And brave and strong and opulent of health,
Which made her take full pleasure of her wealth.
She had a pitying scorn of little souls
And little bodies, levying heavy tolls
On all the world which was less strong than she.
She used her natural strength most naturally,
And yet with due discretion, so that all
Stood equally in bondage to her thrall.
She was of that high godlike shape and size
Which has authority in all men's eyes :
Her hair was brown, her colour white and red,
Nor idly moved to blush. She held her head
Straight with her back. Her body, from the knee
Tall and clean shaped, like some well-nurtured tree,

Rose finely finished to the finger tips.
She had a noble carriage of the hips,
And that proportionate waist which only art
Dares to divine," harmonious part with part.
But of this more anon, or rather never.
All that the world could vaunt for its endeavour
Was the fair promise of her ankles set
Upon a pair of small high-instepped feet,
In whose behalf, though modestly, God wot,
As any nun, she raised her petticoat
One little inch more high than reason meet
Was for one crossing a well-besomed street.
This was the only tribute she allowed
To human folly and the envious crowd ;
Nor for my part would I be found her judge
For her one weakness, nor appear to grudge
What in myself, as surely in the rest,
Bred strange sweet fancies such as feet suggest.
We owe her all too much. This point apart,
Griselda, modesty's own counterpart,
Moved in the sphere of folly like a star,
Aloof and bright and most particular.

By girlish choice and whim of her first will
She had espoused the amiable Lord L.,
A worthy nobleman, in high repute
For wealth and virtue, and her kin to boot ;
A silent man, well mannered and well dressed,
Courteous, deliberate, kind, sublimely blessed
With fortune's favours, but without pretence,
Whom manners almost made a man of sense.
In early life he had aspired to fame
In the world of letters by the stratagem
Of a new issue, from his private press,
Of classic bards in senatorial dress,

"*In usum Marchionis.*" He had spent
Much of his youth upon the Continent,
Purchasing marbles, bronzes, pictures, gems,
In every town from Tiber unto Thames,
And gaining store of curious knowledge too
On divers subjects that the world least knew :
Knowledge uncatalogued, and overlaid
With dust and lumber somewhere in his head.
A slumberous man, in whom the lamp of life
Had never quite been lighted for the strife
And turmoil of the world, but flickered down,
In an uncertain twilight of its own,
With an occasional flash, that only made
A deeper shadow for its world of shade.
When he returned to England, all admired
The taste of his collections, and inquired
To whose fair fortunate head the lot should fall
To wear these gems and jewels after all.
But years went by, and still unclaimed they shone,
A snare and stumbling-block to more than one,
Till in his fiftieth year 'twas vaguely said,
Lord L. already had too long delayed.
Be it as it may, he abdicated life
The day he took Griselda to his wife.

And then Griselda loved him. All agreed,
The world's chief sponsors for its social creed,
That, whether poor Lord L. was or was not
The very fool some said and idiot,
Or whether under cloak of dulness crass,
He veiled that sense best suited to his case,
Sparing his wit, as housewives spare their light,
For curtain eloquence and dead of night ;
And spite of whispered tales obscurely spread,
Doubting the fortunes of her nuptial-bed,

Here at this word all sides agreed to rest :
 Griselda did her duty with the best.

Yet, poor Griselda ! When in lusty youth
 A love-sick boy I stood unformed, uncouth,
 And watched with sad and ever jealous eye
 The vision of your beauty passing by,
 Why was it that that brow inviolate,
 That virginal courage yet unscared by fate,
 That look the immortal queen and huntress wore
 To frightened shepherds' eyes in days of yore
 Consoled me thus, and soothed unconsciously,
 And stilled my jealous fears I knew not why ?
 How shall I tell the secret of your soul
 Which then I blindly guessed, or how cajole
 My boyhood's ancient folly to declare
 Now in my wisdom the dear maid you were,
 Though such the truth ?

9

Griselda's early days

Of married life were not that fitful maze
 Of tears and laughter which betoken aught,
 Changed or exchanged, of pain with pleasure bought,
 Of maiden freedom conquered and subdued,
 Of hopes new born and fears of womanhood.
 Those who then saw Griselda saw a child
 Well pleased and happy, thoughtlessly beguiled
 By every simplest pleasure of her age,
 Gay as a bird just issued from its cage,
 When every flower is sweet. No eye could trace
 Doubt or disquiet written on her face,
 Where none there was. And, if the truth be told,
 Griselda grieved not that Lord L. was old.
 She found it well that her sweet seventeen
 Should live at peace with fifty, and was seen

Just as she felt, contented with her lot,
Pleased with what was and pleased with what was not
She held her husband the more dear that he
Was kind within the bounds of courtesy,
And love was not as yet within her plan,
And life was fair, and wisdom led the van.

For she was wise—oh, wise ! She rose at eight
And played her scales till breakfast, and then sat
The morning through with staid and serious looks,
Counting the columns of her household books,
Her daily labour, or with puzzled head
Bent over languages alive and dead,
Wise as alas ! in life those only are
Who have not yet beheld a twentieth year.
Wealth had its duties, time its proper use,
Youth and her marriage should be no excuse ;
Her education must be made complete !
Lord L. looked on and quite approved of it.
The afternoons, in sense of duty done,
Went by more idly than the rest had gone.
If in the country, which Lord L. preferred,
She had her horse, her dogs, her favourite bird,
Her own rose-garden, which she loved to rake,
Her fish to feed with bread crumbs in the lake,
Her schools, old women, poor and almshouses,
Her sick to visit, or her church to dress.
Lord L. was pleased to see her bountiful :
They hardly found the time to find it dull.

In London, where they spent their second year,
Came occupations suited to the sphere
In which they lived ; and to the just pretence
Of our Griselda's high-born consequence,
New duties to the world which no excuse

Admitted. She was mistress of L. House
And heir to its traditions. These must be
Observed by her in due solemnity.
Her natural taste, I think, repelled the noise,
The rush, and dust, and crush of London joys ;
But habit, which becomes a second sense,
Had reconciled her to its influence
Even in girlhood, and she long had known
That life in crowds may still be life alone,
While mere timidity and want of ease
She never ranked among youth's miseries.
She had her parents too, who made demand
Upon her thoughts and time, and close at hand
Sisters and friends. With these her days were spent
In simple joys and girlish merriment.
She would not own that being called a wife
Should make a difference in her daily life.

Then London lacks not of attractions fit
For serious minds, and treasures infinite
Of art and science for ingenious eyes,
And learning for such wits as would be wise,
Lectures in classes, galleries, schools of art :
In each Griselda played conspicuous part—
Pupil and patron, ay, and patron-saint
To no few poor who live by pens and paint.
The world admired and flattered as a friend,
And only wondered what would be the end.

And so the days went by. Griselda's face,
Calm in its outline, of romantic grace,
Became a type even to the vulgar mind
Of all that beauty means when most refined,
The visible symbol of a soul within,
Conceived immaculate of human sin,

And only clothed in our humanity
That we may learn to praise and better be.
Where'er she went, instinctively the crowd
Made way before her, and ungrudging bowed
To one so fair as to a Queen of Earth,
Ruling by right of conquest and of birth.

And thus I first beheld her, standing calm
In the swayed crowd upon her husband's arm,
One opera night, the centre of all eyes,
So proud she seemed, so fair, so sweet, so wise.
Some one behind me whispered "Lady L. !
His Lordship too ! and thereby hangs a tale."

His Lordship ! I beheld a placid man,
With gentle deep-set eyes, and rather wan,
And rather withered, yet on whose smooth face
Time seemed to have been in doubt what lines to trace
Of youth or age, and so had left it bare,
As it had left its colour to his hair. .
An old young man perhaps, or really old,
Which of the two could never quite be told.
I judged him younger than his years gave right,
His looks betrayed him least by candlelight.
Yet, young or old, that night he seemed to me
Sublime, the priest of her divinity
At whose new shrine I worshipped. But enough
Of me and my concerns ! More pertinent stuff
My tale requires than this first boyish love,
Which never found the hour its fate to prove.
My Lady smiling motions with her hand ;
The crowd falls back ; his Lordship, gravely bland,
Leads down the steps to where his footmen stay
In state. Griselda's carriage stops the way !

And was Griselda happy ? Happy ?—Yes,
In her first year of marriage, and no less
Perhaps, too, in her second and her third.
For youth is proud, nor cares its last sad word
To ask of fate, and not unwilling clings
To what the present hour in triumph brings.
It was enough, as I have said, for her
That she was young and fortunate and fair.
The world that loved her was a lovely world,
The rest she knew not of. Fate had not hurled
A single spear as yet against her life.
She would not argue as 'twixt maid and wife,
Where both were Woman, Human Nature, Man,
Which held the nobler place in the world's plan.
Her soul at least was single, and must be
Unmated still through its eternity.
And, even here in life, what reason yet
To doubt or question or despair of Fate ?
Her youth, an ample web, before her shone
For hope to weave its subtlest fancies on,
If she had cared to dream. Her lot was good
Beyond the common lot of womanhood,
And she would prove her fortune best in this,
That she would not repine at happiness.
Thus to her soul she argued as the Spring
Brought back its joy to each begotten thing—
Begotten and begetting. Who shall say
Which had the better reason, she or they ?

In the fourth year a half acknowledged grief
Made its appearance in Griselda's life.
Her sisters married, younger both than she,
Mere children she had thought, and happily.
Each went her way engrossed by her new bliss,
Too gay to guess Griselda's dumb distress.

Her home was broken. In their pride they wrote
Things that like swords against her bosom smote,
The detail of their hopes, and loves, and fears.
Griselda read, and scarce restrained her tears.
Her mother too, the latest fledgling flown,
Had vanished from the world. She was alone.

When she returned to London, earlier
Than was her custom, in the following year,
She found her home a desert, dark and gaunt ;
L. House looked emptier, gloomier than its wont.
Griselda sighed, for on the table lay
Two letters, which announced each in its way
The expected tidings of her sisters' joy.
Either was brought to bed—and with a boy.
Her generous heart leaped forth to these in vain,
It could not cheat a first sharp touch of pain,
But yielded to its sorrow.

That same night,
Lord L., whose sleep was neither vexed nor light,
And who for many years had ceased to dream,
Beheld a vision. Slowly he became
Aware of a strange light which in his eyes
Shone to his vast discomfort and surprise ;
And, while perplexed with vague mistrusts and fears,
He saw a face, Griselda's face, in tears
Before him. She was standing by his bed
Holding a candle. It was cold, she said,
And shivered. And he saw her wrap her shawl
About her shoulders closely like a pall.
Why was she there ? Why weeping ? Why this light,
Burning so brightly in the dead of night ?
These riddles poor Lord L.'s half-wakened brain
Tried dimly to resolve, but tried in vain.

“ I cannot sleep to-night,” went on the voice,
“ The streets disturb me strangely with their noise,
The cabs, the striking clocks.” Lord L.’s distress
Struggled with sleep. He thought he answered “ Yes.”
“ What can I do to make me sleep ? I am ill,
Unnerv’d to-night. This house is like a well.
Do I disturb you here, and shall I go ? ”
Lord L. was moved. He thought he answered “ No.”
“ If you would speak, perhaps my tears would stop.
Speak ! only speak ! ”

Lord L. here felt a drop
Upon his hand. She had put down the light,
And sat upon his bed forlornly white
And pale and trembling. Her dark hair unbound
Lay on her knees. Her lips moved, but their sound
Came strangely to his ears and half-unheard.
He only could remember the last word :
“ I am unhappy—listen L. :—alone.”
She touched his shoulder and he gave a groan.
“ This is too much. You do not hear me. See,
I cannot stop these tears. Too much ! ”

And he
Now well awake, looked round him. He could catch
A gleam of light just vanished, and the latch
Seemed hardly silent. This was all he knew.
He sat some moments doubting what to do,
Rose, went out, shivered, hearing nothing, crept
Back to his pillow where the vision wept
Or seemed to weep awhile ago, and then
With some disquiet went to sleep again.

Next morning, thinking of his dream, Lord L.
Went down to breakfast in intent to tell

*The story of his vision. But he met
With little sympathy. His wife was late,
And in a hurry for her school of art.
His lordship needed time to make a start
On any topic, and no time she gave.
Griselda had appointments she must save,
And could not stop to hear of rhyme or reason—
The dream must wait a more convenient season.
And so it was not told.*

Alas, alas !

*Who shall foretell what wars shall come to pass,
What woes be wrought, what fates accomplished,
What new dreams dreamt, what new tears vainly shed,
What doubts, what anguish, what remorse, what fears
Begotten in the womb of what new years !—
And all because of this, that poor Lord L.
Was slow of speech, or that he slept too well !*

And quick night flittings had submerged mankind
In one mad dream of luggage left behind,
By the Rhone boat to Provence. This to her
Seemed a delicious land, strange, barren, fair,
An old-world wilderness of greys and browns,
Rocks, olive-gardens, grim dismantled towns,
Deep-streeted, desolate, yet dear to see,
Smelling of oil and of the Papacy.
Griselda first gave reins to her romance
In this forgotten corner of old France,
Feeding her soul on that ethereal food,
The manna of days spent in solitude.
Lord L. was silent. She, as far away,
Saw other worlds which were not of to-day,
With cardinals, popes, Petrarch and the Muse.
She stopped to weep with Laura at Vacluse,
Where waiting in the *mistral* poor Lord L.,
Who did not weep, sat, slept and caught a chill ;
This sent them southwards on through Christendom,
To Genoa, Florence, and at last to Rome,
Where they remained the winter.

Change had wrought

A cure already in Griselda's thought,
Or half a cure. The world in truth is wide,
If we but pace it out from side to side,
And our worst miseries thus the smaller come.
Griselda was ashamed to grieve in Rome,
Among the buried griefs of centuries,
Her own sweet soul's too pitiful disease.
She found amid that dust of human hopes
An incantation for all horoscopes,
A better patience in that wreck of Time :
Her secret woes seemed chastened and sublime

There in the amphitheatre of woe.
 She suffered with the martyrs. These would know,
 Who offered their chaste lives and virgin blood,
 How mortal frailty best might be subdued.
 She saw the incense of her sorrow rise
 With theirs as an accepted sacrifice
 Before the face of the Eternal God
 Of that Eternal City, and she trod
 The very stones which seemed their griefs to sound
 Beneath her steps, as consecrated ground.
 In face of such a suffering hers must be
 A drop, a tear in the unbounded sea
 Which girds our lives. Rome was the home of grief,
 Where all might bring their pain and find relief,
 The temple of all sorrows : surely yet,
 Sorrow's self here seemed swallowed up in it.

'Twas thus she comforted her soul. And then,
 She had found a friend, a 'phoenix among men,
 Which made it easier to compound with life,
 Easier to be a woman and a wife.

This was Prince Belgirate. He of all
 The noble band to whose high fortune fall
 The name and title proudest upon Earth
 While pride shall live by privilege of birth,
 The name of Roman, shone conspicuous
 The head and front of his illustrious house,
 Which had produced two pontiffs and a saint
 Before the world had heard of Charles le Quint ;
 A most accomplished nobleman in truth,
 And wise beyond the manner of his youth,
 With wit and art and learning, and that sense
 Of policy which still is most intense

GRISELDA

Among the fertile brains of Italy,
A craft inherited from days gone by.
As scholar he was known the pupil apt
Of Mezzofanti, in whose learning lapped
And prized and tutored as a wondrous child,
He had sucked the milk of knowledge undefiled
While yet a boy, and brilliantly anon
Had pushed his reputation thus begun
Through half a score of tongues. In art his place
Was as chief patron of the rising race,
Which dreamed new conquests on the glorious womb
Of ancient beauty laid asleep in Rome.
The glories of the past he fain would see
Wrought to new life in this new century,
By that continuous instinct of her sons,
Which had survived Goths, Vandals, Lombards, Huns,
To burst upon a wondering world again
With full effulgence in the Julian reign.

In politics, though prudently withdrawn
From the public service, which he held in scorn,
As being unworthy the deliberate zeal
Of one with head to think or heart to feel ;
And being neither priest, nor soldier, nor
Versed in the practice of Canonic lore,
He made his counsels felt and privately
Lent his best influence to "the Powers that be,"
Counsels the better valued that he stood
Alone, among the youth of stirring blood,
And bowed not to that Baal his proud knee,
The national false goddess, Italy.
He was too stubborn in his Roman pride
To trick out this young strumpet as a bride,
And held in classic scorn who would become
Less than a Roman citizen in Rome.

A man of heart besides and that light wit
Which leavens all, even pedantry's conceit.
None better knew than he the art to shew
A little less in talk than all he knew.
His manner too, and voice, and countenance,
Imposed on all, and these he knew to enhance
By certain freedoms and simplicities
Of language, which set all his world at ease.
A very peer and prince and paragon,
Griselda thought, Rome's latest, worthiest son,
An intellectual phoenix.

On her night

A sudden dawn had broke, portentous, bright.
Her soul had found its fellow. From the day
Of their first meeting on the Appian Way,
Beside Metella's tomb, where they had discussed
The doubtful merit of a new found bust,
And had agreed to differ or agree,
I know not which, a hidden sympathy
Had taken root between them. Either mind
Found in the other tokens of its kind
Which spoke in more than words, and naturally
Leaned to its fellow-mind as tree to tree.
Lord L., who had known the Prince in other days,
While riding home had spoken in his praise,
And won Griselda's heart and patient smile,
For divers threadbare tales of blameless guile
Among the *virtuosi*, where the prince
Had played his part with skill and influence,
His sworn ally. Lord L. grew eloquent,
Finding her ears such rapt attention lent,
And could have gone on talking all his life
About his friend's perfections to his wife.

Griselda listened. In her heart there stirred
A strange unconscious pleasure at each word,
Which made the sunshine brighter and the sky
More blue, more tender in its sympathy.
The hills of the Campagna crowned with snow
Moved her and touched, she knew not why nor how.
The solemn beauty of the world ; the fate
'Of all things living, vast and inchoate
Yet clothed with flowers ; the soul's eternal dream
Of something still beyond ; the passionate whim
Of every noble mind for something good,
Which should assuage its hunger with new food ;
The thrill of hope, the pulse of happiness,
The vague half-conscious longing of the eyes :
All these appealed to her, and seemed to lie
In form and substance under the blue sky,
Filling the shadows of the Sabine Hills
As with a presence, till her natural ill,
Transfigured through a happy mist of tears,
Gave place to hopes yet hardly dreamed as hers.
And still Lord L. talked calmly on, and she
Listened as to the voice of prophecy,
Nursing the pressure which the Prince's hand
Had left in hers, nor cared to understand.

From this day forth, I say, a tender mood
Possessed them both scarce conscious and unwooded,
Even in the Prince, her elder and a man.
'At least Griselda had no thought nor plan
Beyond the pleasure of a friendship dear
To all alike, Lord L., the Prince, and her :
No plan but that the day would be more sweet,
More full of meaning, if they chanced to meet ;
And this chanced every day. The Prince was kind
Beyond all kindness, and Lord L. could find

No words to speak his thanks he thus should be
The cicerone of their company.

And where a better ? Belgirate's lore
In all things Roman was in truth a store
From which to steal. At her Gamaliel's knees
Griselda sat and learned Rome's mysteries
With all the zeal of a disciple young
And strange to genius and a pleading tongue.
The Prince was eloquent. His theme was high,
One which had taught less vigorous wings to fly,
The world of other days, the Pagan Rome,
The scarce less Pagan Rome of Christendom.
On these the Prince spoke warmly much and well,
Holding Griselda's patient ears in spell,
Yet broke off smiling when he met her eye
Fixed on his face in its mute sympathy,
A smile which was a question, an appeal,
And seemed to ask the meaning of her zeal.
He did not understand her quite. He saw
Something beyond, unfixed by any law
Of woman's nature his experience knew.
He knew not what to hold or hope as true,
For she was young and sad and beautiful,
A very woman with a woman's soul.
She had so strange a pathos in her eyes,
A tone so deep, such echoes in her voice.
What was this Roman Hecuba to her ?
This prate of consul, pontiff, emperor ?
These broken symbols of forgotten pride ?
These ashes of old fame by fame denied ?
What were these stones to her that she should weep,
Or spend her passion on a cause less deep
Than her own joys and sorrows ? Was it love,
Or what thing else had such a power to move ?

If there was meaning in red lips ! And yet
'Twere rank impiety to think of it.
An Italian woman—yes. But she ? Who knew
What English virtue dared yet dared not do ?

This was the thought which lent its mockery
"To the more tender omen of his eye,
And checked the pride and chilled the vague desire
Her beauty half had kindled into fire.
Yet hope was born and struggled to more life,
A puny infant with its fears at strife,
An unacknowledged hidden bastard child,
Too fair to crush, too wise to be beguiled ;
Even Griselda's prudery confessed
A star of Bethlehem risen in her East.

And thus the winter passed in happiness
If not in love. I leave to each to guess
What name 'twere best to give it. For to some
Who judge such things by simple rule of thumb,
'Twill seem impossible they thus should meet
Day after day in palace, temple, street,
Beneath the sun of heaven or in the shade
Of those old gardens by the cypress made,
Or on their horses drinking in the wind
Of the Campagna, and with care behind,
Left to take vengeance upon poor Lord L.,
Some furlongs back a solemn sentinel,
Or in the twilight slowly stealing home
Towards the hundred cupolas of Rome,
To greet the new-born moon and so repeat
Old Tuscan ditties, tender, wise, and sweet,
To the light chatter of their horse-hoofs' chime
In echoing answer of their terza-rhyme—

'Twill seem, I say, to some impossible
That all this was not love. Yet, sooth to tell,
Easter had come and gone, and yet, 'twas true
No word of love had passed between the two.

The fact is, after the first halcyon hour
When she had met the Prince and proved his power
To move her inmost soul, Griselda made
This compact with her heart no less than head,
Being a woman of much logic sense,
And knowing all, at least by inference.
She was resolved that, come what evil might
On her poor heart, the right should still be right,
And not a hair's breadth would she swerve from this,
Though it should cost her soul its happiness.
She would not trifle longer, nor provide
The Prince with pretext for his further pride,
Or grant more favour than a friendship given
Once and for all, in this world as in Heaven.
This she indeed could offer, but, if more
Were asked, why then, alas ! her dream was o'er.
I think no actual covenant had passed
In words between them either first or last,
But that the Prince, though puzzled and perplexed,
Had drawn a just conclusion from his text,
And read her meaning, while the hazard made,
Of certain idle words at random said,
Had sapped his confidence, and served to show
If speech were wise, 'twas wiser to forgo.

Once too he wrote a sonnet. They had spent
An afternoon (it was in early Lent)
At that fair angle of the city wall
Which is the English place of burial,

A poet's pilgrimage to Shelley's tomb,
The holiest spot, Griselda thought, in Rome,
A place to worship in, perhaps to pray,
At least to meditate and spend the day.

She had brought her friend with her. She had at heart
To win his homage for the unknown art
Of this dead alien priest of Italy,
This lover of the earth, and sea, and sky ;
And, reading there and talking in that mood
Which comes of happiness and youthful blood
So near akin to sorrow, their discourse
Had touched on human pain and pain's remorse
Amid the eternal greenness of the Spring ;
And, when they came to part, there had seemed to ring
A note of trouble in Griselda's voice,
A sigh as if in grief for human joys,
An echo of unspoken tenderness,
Which caused the Prince to hold her hand in his
One little moment longer than was right,
When they had shaken hands and bid good-night.

And so he wrote that evening on the spur
Of the first tender impulse of the hour
A sonnet to Griselda, a farewell
It seemed to be, yet also an appeal,
Perhaps a declaration ; who shall say
Whether the thought which lightened into day,
Between the sorrowing accents of each line,
Was more despair, or hope which asked a sign ?

“ Farewell,” it said, “ although nor seas divide
Nor kingdoms separate, but a single street,
The sole sad gap between us, scarce too wide
For hands to cross, and though we needs must meet

Not in a year, a month, but just to-morrow,
When the first happy instinct of our feet
Bears us together,—yet we part in sorrow,
Bidding good-bye, as though we would repeat
Good-byes for ever. There are gulfs that yawn
Between us wide with time and circumstance,
Deep as the gulf which lies 'twixt dead and dead.
The day of promise finds no second dawn.
See, while I speak, the pressure of our hands
Fades slowly from remembrance, and is fled,
And our weak hearts accept their fate. Nay, nay,
We meet again, but never as to-day."

To this Griselda answered nothing. She
Was pleased, yet disconcerted. Poetry
Is always pleasant to a woman's ear,
And to Griselda's had been doubly dear,
If it had touched less nearly. But her heart
Had bounded with too violent a start
To leave her certain of her self-control,
In this new joy which seemed to probe her soul.
And feeling frightened she had tried to find
A reason for the tumult of her mind
In being angry. He should not have dared
To strike so near the truth. Or had she bared
Her soul so plain to his that he should speak
Of both as an eye-witness? She felt weak
And out of temper with herself and him,
And with the sudden waking from a dream
Too long indulged, and with her own sad fate,
Which made all dreams a crime against the State.
There yawned indeed a gulf between them. This
It needed no such word as had been his
To bring back to her memory or show
How wide it was, and deep, and far below;

And yet she shuddered, for already thought
Had led her to the brink where reason fought
With folly, and conjured it to look down
Into the vast and terrible unknown.
This was itself an omen.

All that day

Griselda had a headache, and said nay
To those who called, the Prince among the rest,
Who came distrusting and returned distressed.
Awhile this humour lasted. Then they met,
And Belgirate, venturing a regret
For having vexed her with so poor a rhyme,
Griselda had protested want of time
And want of talent as her sole excuse
For having made no answer to his Muse,
Yet cast withal a look so pitiful
Upon his face it moved his very soul.
This closed the incident. He might have spoken
Perhaps that instant, and received some token
Of more than a forgiveness. But his fate
Had willed it otherwise or willed too late,
For love forgives not, plead it as we may
To speak the unspoken "Yes" of yesterday.

CHAPTER III

WHO has not seen the falls of Tivoli,
The rocks, the foam-white water, and the three
Fair ruined temples which adorn the hill ?
Who has not sat and listened to the shrill
Sweet melody of blackbirds, and the roar
Of Anio's voice rebounding from the shore,
Nor would have given his very soul to greet
Some passing vision of a white nymph's feet,
And waving arms, as the wild chasm's spray
Beat on his face, for ever answering " Nay " ?
Who has not turned away with sadder face,
Abashed before the genius of the place,
A wiser man, and owned upon his knees,
The dull transmontane Goth and boor he is ?
Who that was born to feel ?

What sons of clay
Are these that stand among your shrines to-day,
Gods of the ancient rivers ! and who set
The heavy impress of barbarian feet
Upon your classic shores, and dare to love
Your ruined homes in temple, rock, and grove !
What new rude sons of Japhet ! What mad crew,
Whose only creed is what it dares to do
Through lack of knowledge, whose undoubting heart,
Here in the very temples of old art,

Brings out its little tribute, builds its shrines,
Wreathes its sad garlands of untutored lines,
Writes, paints, professes, sculptures its new gods,
And dares to have its home in your abodes !

Oh, if I had a soul oppressed with song,
A tongue on fire to prophesy among
My brother prophets, if I had a hand
Which needs must write its legend on life's sand
With brush or chisel, I at least would choose
Some soil less fair, less sacred to the Muse,
Some younger, wilder land, where no sad voice
Had ever stammered forth its tale of joys
And loves and sorrows, or in tones less rude
Than the brute pulsing of its human blood ;
If I would build a temple, it should be
At least not here, not here in Italy,
Where all these temples stand. My thought should shape
Its fancies in rough granite on some cape
O'erlooking the Atlantic, from whose foam
No goddess ever leaped, and not in Rome,
Beneath the mockery of immortal eyes,
Gazing in marble down, so coldly wise !

Such was Griselda's thought, which, half aloud,
She uttered one May morning 'mid a crowd
Of pleasure-seekers, come from Rome to see
The wonder of these falls of Tivoli,
And Belgirate's villa, where the Prince
Was offering entertainment (for his sins),
And dancing, to all such as called him friend
That Spring in Rome, now nearly at an end ;—
A thought suggested by the place and by
A German painter, who undauntedly

Was plying a huge canvas just begun,
 With brush and palette seated in the sun.
 She had hardly meant to speak, and when Lord L.
 Objected (for he knew his classics well)
 That landscape-painting was an unknown trade
 In the days of Horace, blushed for her tirade,
 And turned to Belgirate, who stood near,
 Playing the host to all the world and her.

The Prince appealed to, though his care was less
 With what was spoken than the speaker's face,
 Took up the parable, confessed the truth
 Of all each ventured, and agreed with both.
 Nature, he said, and art, though now allied,
 Had not in all times thus walked side by side.
 Indeed the love of Nature, now so real,
 Was alien to the love of the ideal,
 The classic love which claimed as though of need
 Some living presence for each fountain-head,
 Each grove, each cavern, satyr, nymph, or god,
 A human shape unseen yet understood.
 This was the thought which lived in ancient art,
 Eschewing the waste places of the heart,
 And only on compulsion brought to face
 Brute Nature's aspect in its nakedness.
 Nature as Nature was a thought too rude
 For these, untempered in its solitude.
 It had no counterpart in our new love
 Of mountain, sea, and forest. Then each grove
 Asked for its statue, each perennial spring
 Its fountain. Solitude itself must bring
 Its echo. Every mountain top of Greece
 Beheld fair temples rise. A law of peace
 Reigned over art in protest at the mood
 Of social life which drenched the world in blood.

All now had been reversed. Our modern creed
Scouted the law that men were born to bleed.
It turned from human nature, if untaught,
And wrought mankind, perhaps and overwrought
Into trim shapes, and then for its relief
Rushed to the wilderness to vent its grief
In lonely passion. Here it neither sought
Nor found a presence which it needed not.
It chose wild hills and barren seas. It saw
Beauty in tumult, in revolt a law.
Here it gave reins to its brute instincts. Here
It owned no god, no guide, no arbiter.
Its soul it must avenge of discipline,
And Nature had gone naked from the shrine.
This was its consolation.

Of the score
Who stood around him and who praised his lore,
Perhaps no single listener understood
The thought which underlay the Prince's mood,
Or guessed its bitterness—not even she
Who lent the moral to his mockery.
Yet she was moved. In her too was a need
Of consolation for too fair a creed,
An impulse of rebellion. In her blood
There lived a germ of Nature unsubdued,
Which would not be appeased. She too had sought
A refuge from the tyranny of thought
In the brute impulses of sea and plain
And cloud and forest far from haunts of men.
A vain mad search. The fetters of her pride
Galled her like sores. Griselda turned and sighed.

That evening on the terrace, vaguely lit
With paper lanterns and the infinite

Display of those fair natural lamps, the stars,
And 'neath the influence of the planet Mars
Or Venus or another—which it was
We best may judge by that which came to pass—
The Prince essayed his fortune.

From the hour

Of their first flash of eloquence, some power,
Some most persistent and ingenious fate
Of idle tongues had held them separate,
Griselda and the Prince—him in his part
Of host, with cares not wholly of the heart
Demanding his attention, while on her
Friends fastened more than dull and less than dear.
In vain they stopped, and loitered, and went on,
Leaving no trick untried, unturned no stone ;
In vain they waited. Still the hope deferred
Failed of its object, one consoling word,
One little sigh as of relief thus given :
“ Well, they are gone at last, and thanked be Heaven.
But hour on hour went by, and accident
Seemed still at pains to frustrate their intent,
Piling up grief for them and poor Lord L.,
On whom, in fault of foes, their vengeance fell.
’Twas worst for her. She knew not whom to strike,
Lord L., her friends, the Prince ? ’Twas now alike.
She had lost in fact her temper, if I dare
Thus speak of one so wise and one so fair,
And to the point that now there was no room
For other thought, but L. should take her home,
Away and speedily.

The Prince, who knew

No word of what a storm Fate held in brew,

And who had sought, in innocence of all,
Griselda's hand to lead the opening ball,
And sought in vain, now found, to his despair,
My lady cloaked and standing on the stair.
She was alone. "Lord L. had gone," she said,
"To bid the Prince good night. Her foolish head
Had played her false, and ached with the new heat
Of the May sun (even L. complained of it).
They must be home betimes. Next day was Sunday,
And they had much to do 'twixt that and Monday,
In view of their departure." "Whither? whence?
In Heaven's name," exclaimed the astounded Prince.
"Why, home to England, she had thought he knew:
She must have told him. L. was more than due
In London, where his place in Parliament
Required his presence. He had missed the Lent,
And dared not miss the Easter session. She
Thought he was right, altho'," and suddenly
She burst in tears. The Prince, in dire distress,
Besought her to be calm. But she, with face
Hid in both hands, and turning from the light,
Broke from his arms, and rushed into the night.
Across the hall, beneath the portico,
And down the steps she fled, to where below
The garden lay all dim with starlit shade,
And the white glimmer of the main façade.
Here Belgirate found her on a seat,
Crouched in an angle of the parapet,
And sobbing as in terror. His surprise
Was changed to resolution. To his eyes
The world became transfigured. "Lady L.,"
He whispered, "what is this? You love me? Well,
Why do you weep?"

He took her hands in his
And pressed them to his lips; and at the kiss

Griselda started from the heap she was
And sat upright, with pale pathetic face
Turned to the night. By the dim starlight he
Beheld, half-awed and half in ecstasy,
The strange emotion of her countenance.
She made no gesture to withdraw her hands,
No sign of disagreement with his words.
Her eyes looked scared and troubled like a bird's
Caught in a net, and seemed to ask of Fate
Where the next blow should fall. 'Twas thus she sat
Speechless, inanimate, nor seemed to breathe.
The Prince could hear the chattering of her teeth,
And feel her shiver in the warm night wind,
And yet its touch was hardly thus unkind.

He too, poor soul, in hope and tenderness,
Still kissed her hands, and kissed her gloves and dress,
And kneeling at her feet embraced her knees
With soothing arms and soft cajoleries.
She dared not turn nor speak. The balustrade
Served as a pretext for her with its shade
Hiding his face. She would not seem to guess
All that his fondness asked of her distress :
A word might break the spell. She only knew
She was a poor sad woman, doomed to do
Sorrow to all who loved her, that the Prince
Had spoken truly, and her long pretence
Of innocence was o'er. She scorned to make
An idle protest now for honour's sake.
He had a right to ask for what he would
Now that she loved him, and her womanhood
Reserved one tearful right, and only one,
To hide her face an instant and be gone.

How long they sat thus silent who shall say ?
Griselda knew not. Time was far away ;

*She wanted courage to prepare her heart
For that last bitterest word of all, " We part. "*
And ne cared naught for time. His Heaven was there,
Nor needed thought, nor speech, nor even prayer.

A sound of music roused them. From the house
Voices broke in and strains tumultuous,
Proving the dance begun. Then with a sigh
Griselda turned her head, and piteously
Looked in his face. She moved as if to go,
And when he held her still, " For pity, no,
Let me be gone," she cried. " I ask it thus,"
Clasping her hands. " You will not ? No ! alas !
You must not doubt me when I speak the truth ;
This is a great misfortune for us both."
" Griselda," he began. " Oh, stop," she said,
" You know not what you ask." She bent her head
Close to his own. " I am not what I seem,
A woman to be loved, not even by him
Whom I might choose to worship. Mine must be
An unfinished life, not quite a tragedy,
Even to my friends, an idle aimless life,
Not worth an argument, still less a strife.
You must forget, forgive me. We were friends,
Friends still perhaps ; but, oh ! this first day ends
Our love for ever. What you said was true,
Only I never guessed it."

The Prince knew
That she was weeping, and a single sob
Broke from her lips. She seemed her wounds to probe.
" Yes, I have loved you, loved you from the first,
The day we met at Terni, when you burst

Like sunshine on the storm of my dark life—
 You, wise and free—I, only the sad wife
 Of one you called a friend. The fault was mine
 And mine alone. In you there was no sin :
 You stood too far from me, too high above
 My woman's follies even to dream of love.
 There, do not answer, you were kind to me,
 Good, patient, wise—you could no other be—
 But, oh ! you never loved me.”

Here again

The Prince broke in protesting (but in vain) :
 Her words were madness and his heart was hers.
 She would not listen nor control her tears.
 “ You never loved me. This one thought I hold
 In consolation of my manifold
 Deceits and errors. You at least are free
 From all deceptions and remorse and me :
 I cannot cause you sorrow, else it were
 Indeed too pitiful, too hard to bear.”

She stooped and kissed his forehead reverently,
 As one would kiss a relic ; and when he
 Still would have spoken, stopped him with a hand
 Laid on his lips, half-prayer and half-command.
 She would not let him speak. The prince, tho' mute,
 Now pleaded with his hands and pressed his suit
 With better eloquence, for this to her
 Seemed less a crime than speech. Her ignorant fear
 Had hardly fathomed yet the troubled sea
 On which her lot was cast thus dangerously.
 She only feared his words to prove him right,
 And these caresses in the dim still night
 Soothed and consoled her. They were too unreal,
 Too strange to her experience, quite to feel

Or quite to question. She, with half-shut eyes,
And face averted, ceased to feel surprise,
And ceased to think. She was a child again,
Caressed and fondled. She forgot her pain,
And almost even his presence in the place.
He was too near and could not see her face.
Besides, Griselda loved him. Only once
She made a silent protest with her hands,
As one might make asleep, and in her dream
Opened her eyes, and seemed to question him
With the pathetic instinct as of doom.
The Prince in rapture judged his hour was come.

Alas ! poor Prince. If thou hadst had thy bliss,
I would not then have grudged thy happiness,
Thine nor Griselda's. Happiness is not
A merchandise men buy or leave unbought
And find again. It is a wild bird winging
Its way through heaven, in joyous circles ringing,
Aloft, at its own will. Then, ere we wist,
It stooped and 'sat a moment on our wrist,
And fondled with our fingers, and made play
With jess and hood as if it meant to stay.
And we, if we were wise and fortunate,
And if the hour had been decreed of fate,
Seized the glad bird and held it in our hand,
And forced it to obey our least command,
Knowing that never more, if not made sure,
It would come again to voice, or sign, or lure.

Oh, such is happiness. That night for them
Fate stood, a genius, suppliant and tame,
Demanding to do service. Had they willed,
The treasure-house of Heaven had been unfilled

And emptied in their lap. They too, even they,
Mere mortals born, inheritors of clay,
Had known eternal life, and been as gods.
Only the will between them was at odds,
Only the word was wanting.

What one thing

It was that frightened Fate to taking wing,
And scared for ever the celestial bird,
And left them desolate, if I have heard
I do not now remember nor would say
Even if I knew. 'Twas told me not to-day
Nor yesterday, but in a time long since,
By one of the two who knew, in confidence,
And then not quite perhaps the utter truth.
Whoever tells it? But there came to both
A moment when, as Belgirate knew,
There was no further power to plead or sue :
They had played with Fate too long. Their hour was over ;
She was no more his love nor he her lover.
His courage was exhausted. One by one
His fingers, which still held Griselda's gown,
Relaxed their hold. His hands dropped by his side,
His head upon his bosom, and the pride,
Which was the reason of his being, quailed.
Grief in that hour and tenderness prevailed,
And tears rushed to his eyes, long strangers there,
And to his lips, Italian-like, a prayer,
While he lay prostrate, his face turned from heaven,
Under the stars.

The tower clock struck eleven
And roused him. He had neither heard nor known
Griselda's going, but he was alone.

And she ? Griselda ? In a whirl of grief,
Tortured, distracted, hopeless of relief,
And careless now, what eye should see her tears,
Whom none could mock with bitterer jibes than hers,
And speechless to all question of her lord,
Who sought to learn what portent had occurred,
And still reverted to the theme begun
Of Roman fever and the Roman sun ;
She was driven back to Rome. Two days her door
Was shut to all the world, both rich and poor,
And on the third she went to Ostia,
Pleading a wild desire to see the sea.

The sea ! What virtue is there in the sea
That it consoles us thus in misery ?
In joy we do not love it, and our bliss
Scoffs at its tears and scorns its barrenness.
Our pride of life is in the fruitful Earth,
The mother of all joy, which gave us birth,
The Earth so touching in its hopes to be,
So green, so tender in its sympathy.
But when life turns to bitterness—ah ! then,
Where is Earth's message to the sons of men ?
How does she speak ? What sound of grief is hers
To match our grief ? What tale of pity stirs
Her jubilant heart ? The laughing woods give back
Naught of their happiness to those who lack.
The beauty of the uplands bars relief,
The prosperous fields are insolent to grief ;
There is no comfort in the lowing herds,
The hum of bees, the songs, the shouts of birds ;
There is no sob in all the living earth,
Naught but the flutter of discordant mirth,
On which, as on a pageant, morn and even
The careless sun shines mockingly from heaven.

There is no grief in all the world save one,
The ocean's voice, as tearful as our own.
Then from the Earth we turn—too potent mother,
Too joyous in her offspring—to that other,
The childless, joyless, unproductive sea,
And mourn with her her dread virginity.
We clasp her naked rocks with our two hands,
Barefoot we tread her barren waste of sands,
Her breadths of shingle and her treeless shore,
Knowing her griefs are as our griefs, and more,
An eternal lack of love.

'Twas in this guise
Griselda cradled her soul's miseries,
And nursed it in its anguish like a child,
And soothed it to oblivion. The sea smiled
With its eternal smile upon her sorrow,
The selfsame yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,
And kept its tears in its own bosom sealed,
A mystery of passion unrevealed,
Save in the tremor of its voice at noon,
When the wind rose and played wild chords thereon.
So she.

The memory of that place long stood
In her remembrance as a dream of good,
Dividing life as sleep divides the day,
A place of utter weakness. Let those say
Who will, that deeds of strength life's milestones are.
The dearest days are not the days of war,
And victory is forgotten in the peace
Of certain hours gone by in helplessness,
When the soul ceased to battle, and lay still
As on a deathbed dumb to good and ill.
These are its treasures.

Nor was silence all
Griselda's ointment. Hard by the sea-wall,
Where daily her steps turned fresh peace to find,
A convent stood, inviting to the mind.
Here she found entrance at the chapel gate,
And knelt in prayer half-inarticulate,
Bowed to the earth. For patron saints it had
The Marys three—"two virtuous, and one bad,"
Griselda thought, "like her own self"—who came
In flight together from Jerusalem,
And landed there; and these in her great need,
She suppliant asked for her soul's daily bread,
Using all fondest words her lips could frame,
To speak her secret wishes without blame.
Six candlesticks she vowed, to each a pair,
So they would listen to and grant her prayer.
The superstition pleased her. In her pride
She bowed and begged like any peasant's bride,
For what? for whom? she hardly could explain
Even to her, the dear St. Magdalen.
"And yet," she argued, "she at least will know
And understand me if no other do."

All this was folly, but it comforted
And gave her strength. Then with a calmer head,
If not a calmer heart, she turned once more
From love to life. Her first strong grief was o'er.

CHAPTER IV

How shall I take up this vain parable
And ravel out its issue ? Heaven and Hell,
The principles of good and evil thought,
Embodied in our lives, have blindly fought
Too long for empire in my soul to leave
Much for its utterance, much that it can grieve.
A soldier on the battlefield of life,
I have grown callous to the signs of strife,
And feel the wounds of others and my own
With scarce a tremor and without a groan.
I have seen many perish in their sins,
Known much of frailty and inconsequence,
And if I laughed once, now I dare not be
Other than sad at man's insanity.
Therefore, in all humility of years,
Colder and wiser for hopes drowned in tears,
And seeking no more quarries for my mirth,
Who most need pity of the sons of earth,
I dip in kindlier ink my chastened pen,
And fill of my lost tale what leaves remain.

Years passed. Griselda from my wandering sight
Had waned and vanished, like a meteor bright,
Leaving no pathway in my manhood's heaven
Save only memories vaguely unforgiven
Of something fair and sad, which for a day
Had lit its zenith and had gone its way.

Rome and the Prince, the tale that I had heard,
Griselda's beauty—all that once had stirred
My curious thought to wonder and regret,
In the vexed problem of her woman's fate,
Had yielded place to the world's work-day cares,
The wealth it covets and the toil it dares.
I was no more a boy, when idle chance
And that light favour which attends romance
Brought me once more within the transient spell
Of other days, and dreams of Lady L.

'Twas in September—(I have always found
That month in my life's record dangerous ground,
Whether it be due to some unreasoned stress
Of the mad stars which dog our happiness,
Or whether, since in truth most things are due
To natural causes, if our blindness knew,
To the strong law of Nature's first decay,
Warning betimes of time that cannot stay,
And summer perishing, and hours to come,
Lit by less hope in the year's martyrdom ;
And so we needs must seize at any cost
Fleet pleasure's hem lest all our day be lost)—
'Twas in September, at a country house
In the Midland shires, where I had come, God knows,
Without a fancy but of such light sort
As manhood ventures in the realms of sport
With that dear god of slaughter England's sons
Adore with incense-smoke and roar of guns,
That this new chapter opens. Who had guessed
So rare a phoenix housed in such a nest ?

For we, in truth, were no wise company,
Men strong and joyous, keen of hand and eye,

And shrewd for pleasure, but whose subtlest wit
Was still to jest at life while using it,
And jest at love, as at a fruit low hung
To all men's lips, no matter whence it sprung.
A fool's philosophy, yet dear to youth
Bred without knowledge of the nobler truth,
And seeming wisdom, till the bitter taste
Of grief has come to cure its overhaste.
Naught was there, in the scene nor in the parts
Played by the actors, worthy serious hearts,
Or worthy her whose passion trod a stage
High o'er the frailties of our prurient age,
Griselda and her unattained fair dream
Of noble deeds and griefs unknown to them.
How came she there ?

Our hostess was a woman
Less famed for wisdom than a heart all human
Rich in life's gifts, a wealthy generous soul,
But still too fair and still too bountiful.
The rest, mad boydens of the world, whose worth
Lay mired with folly, earthiest of the earth.
How came she there ?

When I, unconscious all
Of such high presence at our festival,
Heard her name bandied in the general hum
Of hungry tongues, which told the guests had come,
And saw in converse with our host the form,
Familiar once in sunshine and in storm,
Of her who was to me the type and sign
Of all things noble, not to say Divine,
Breathing the atmosphere of that vain house,
My heart stopped beating. Half incredulous,

I looked and questioned in my neighbours' eyes,
Seeking the sense of this supreme surprise.
My thought took words, as at the table set
Men's lips were loosed, discoursing while they ate,
And each to each.

Beside me, of the crew
Of gilded youths who swelled the retinue
Of our fair hostess in her daily lot
Of hunting laughter when field sports were not,
Sat one, a joyous boy, whom fashion's freak,
A mad-cap purse-string and a beardless cheek,
Had set pre-eminent in pleasure's school
To play the hero and to play the fool
For those few years which are the summer's day
Of fashion's foils ere they are cast away.
Young Jerry Manton! Happy fortune's son!
What heights of vanity your creed had won,
Creed of adventure, and untiring words
And songs and loves as brainless as a bird's.
Who would not envy you your lack of sense,
Your lawless jibes, your wealth of insolence,
The glory of your triumphs unconcealed
In pleasure's inmost and most sacred field?
Who would not share the sunshine of your mirth,
Your god-like smile, your consciousness of worth,
The keenness of your wit in the world's ways,
Your heart so callous to its blame or praise?
Him I addressed, in pursuance of my doubt
How such a prodigy had come about.

Young Manton eyed me. "Every road," he said,
"Leads—well—to Rome." He laughed and shook his head,
As if in censure of a thought less sage.
"My lady's thirty is a dangerous age,

And of the three where most misfortunes come
 Is the worst strewn with wrecks in Christendom.”
 “ You see,” he added, “ we are not all wise
 In all dilemmas and all companies,
 And there are times and seasons when the best
 Has need of an hour’s frolic with the rest,
 If only to set free the importunate load
 Of trouble pressing on an uphill road.
 Women’s first snare is vanity. At twenty
 Praises are pleasant, be they ne’er so plenty ;
 And some, the foolish ones, are thus soon caught
 Seeking to justify the flattery taught.
 These are the spendthrifts, dear ingenuous souls,
 Whose names emblazoned stand on pleasure’s rolls,
 Manning the hosts of mirth. Apart from them,
 More serious or less eager in their aim,
 The wise ones wait like birds that hold aloof,
 Conscious of danger and the cloven hoof.
 Yet there are times.”

He paused awhile and sighed.
 “ The second snare,” said he “ is set less wide ;
 It stands midway between the dawn of youth
 And beauty’s sunset, with its naked truth,
 A danger hidden cunningly in flowers
 And the wild drowsing of the noontide hours.
 Here fall the elect, the chosen virtuous few,
 Who have outlived the worst the storm could do,
 But faint when it is over, through mere stress
 Of their mortality’s first weariness.
 ’Tis hard to see youth perish, even when
 Ourselves to the mad warrant have set pen ;
 And for the wisest there are days of grief
 And secret doubts and hours of unbelief

In all things but the one forbidden bliss
Churchmen forbid and poets call a kiss.
Why should we wonder ? 'Tis a kindlier fate
At least than that, the last, which comes too late,
The old fool's folly nursed at forty-five.
Griselda is an angel, but alive,
Believe me, to her wings." A fatuous flush
Mantled his face, not quite perhaps a blush,
But something conscious, as of one who knows.
"Virtue and pleasure are not always foes,"
He sighed. "And much depends upon the man."

I turned impatient. There, behind her fan,
At the far table's end, Griselda's eyes
Were watching us, half hid by its disguise,
But conscious too, as if a secret string
Had vibrated 'twixt her and that vain thing,
The cynic boy, whose word was in my ear,
Dishonouring to me and him and her.
Our eyes met, and hers fell ; a sudden pain
Touched me of memory, and in every vein
Ran jealous anger at young Manton's wit,
While, half aloud, I flung my curse on it.

Later, I found Griselda gravely gay,
And glad to see me in the accustomed way
Of half affection my long zeal had won,
Her face no older, though the years had spun
Some threads unnoticed in her fair brown hair
Of lighter hue than I remembered there,
Less silver streaked than gold. All else had grown
Fairer with time, and tenderer in its tone,
As when in August woods a second burst
Of leaves is seen more golden than the first.

A woman truly to be loved—but loving ?
There was the riddle wit despaired of proving,
For who can read the stars ? I sat with her
The evening through, and rose up happier.
In all that crowd there was no single face
Worthy her notice, not to say her grace,
And once again her charm was on my soul.
“ If she love any ”—this was still the goal
Of my night thoughts in argument with fear—
“ Say what they will, the lover is not here.”
Not here ! And yet, at parting, she had pressed
Manton’s sole hand, and nodded to the rest.

Four days I lived in my fool’s paradise,
Importuning Griselda’s changing eyes
With idle flattery. I found her mood
Softer than once in her young womanhood,
Yet restless and uncertain. There were hours
Of a wild gaiety, when all the powers
Of her keen mind were in revolt with folly,
Others bedimmed with wordless melancholy.
Once too or twice she shocked me with a phrase
Of doubtful sense, revealing thoughts and ways
New to her past, an echo of the noise
Of that mad world we lived in and its joys :
Such things were sacrilege. I could not see
Unmoved my angel smirched with vanity,
Even though, it seemed at moments, for my sake.
Her laughter, when she laughed, made my heart ache,
And I had spared some pain to see her sad
Rather than thus unseasonably glad.

Who would have dreamed it ? Each new idle day,
When, tired with sport, we rested from the fray,

Five jovial shooters, jaded by the sun,
Seeking refreshment at the stroke of noon,—
There, with the luncheon carts all trimly dight,
Stood Lady L., to the fool crowd's delight.
You would have thought her life had always been
Passed in the stubbles, as, with questions keen,
She eyed the bags and parleyed with the "guns";
Rome's matron she with us the Goths and Huns.
Young Manton proudly spread for her his coat
Under a hedge, and she resented not.
Resented! Why resent? Nay, smiles were there,
And a swift look of pleasure, still more rare,
Pleasure and gratitude, as though the act
Had been of chivalry in form and fact
Transcending Raleigh's. Ay, indeed! Resent!
That eye were blind which doubted what it meant.

And still I doubted. Vanity dies hard.
And love, however starving of reward,
And youth's creed of belief. It seemed a thing
Monstrous, impossible, bewildering,
As tales of dwarfs and giants gravely told
By men of science, and transmuted gold,
And magic potions turning men to beasts,
And lewd witch Sabbaths danced by unfrocked priests.
Griselda! Manton! In what mood or tense
Could folly conjugate such dreams to sense,
Or draw the contract not in terms absurd
Of such a friendship or of act or word?
Where was the common thought between the two—
Even of partridges—the other knew?
Manton—Griselda! Nay 'twere fabulous,
A mere profanity, to argue thus;

Only I watched them closer when they strayed
To gather blackberries, as boy and maid
In a first courting, and her eager eyes
Turned as he spoke, and laughter came unwise
Before she answered, and an hour was flown,
Before he joined the rest and she was gone.

O' Love ! what an absurdity thou art,
How heedless of proportion, whole or part !
Time, place, occasion, what are they to thee ?
Thou playest the wanton with Solemnity,
The prince with Poverty, the rogue with Worth,
The fool with all the Wisdoms of the Earth.
Thou art a leveller, more renowned than Death,
For he, when in his rage he stops our breath,
Leaves us at least the harvest of our years,
The right to be heroic in our tears.
But thou dost only mock. Thou art a king
Dealing with slaves, who waits no questioning
But gives—to this a province and a crown,
To that a beggar's staff and spangled gown ;
And when some weep their undeserved disgrace,
Plucks at their cheeks and smites them in the face.
Thou hast no reverence, no respect for right.
Virtue to thee is a lewd appetite,
Remorse a pastime, modesty a lure,
And love, the malady, love's only cure.

Griselda, in her love at thirty-three
Was the supreme fool of felicity.
Reason and she had taken separate roads,
A spectacle of mirth for men and gods.
And the world laughed—discreetly in its sleeves—
At her poor artless shifts and make-believes.

For it was true, true to the very text,
 This whispered thing that had my soul perplexed,
 Manton was her beloved—by what art,
 What mute equation of the human heart,
 What blind jibe of dame Fortune, who shall say ?
 The road of passion is no king's highway,
 Mapped out with finger-posts for all to see,
 But each soul journeys on it separately,
 And only those who have walked its mazes through
 Remember on what paths, the wild flowers grew.

Ay, who shall say ? Nor had the truth been sung,
 Save for the incontinence of Manton's tongue,
 Wagging in argument on certain themes,
 With boast of craft in pleasure's stratagems.
 " For Love " ('twas thus he made his parable
 In cynic phrase, as hero of his tale,
 One evening when the others were abed,
 And we two sat on smoking, head to head,
 Discoursing in that tone of men scarce friends,
 Who prate philosophy to candle ends),
 " Love, though its laws have not as yet been written
 By any Balzac for our modern Britain,
 And though perhaps there is no strategy
 Youth can quite count upon or argue by,
 Is none the less an art, with some few rules
 Wise men observe, who would outrun the fools.
 Now, for myself " (here Manton spread his hands
 With professorial wave in white wrist-bands)
 " I hold it as a maxim always wise
 In making love to deal with contraries.
 Colours, books tell us, to be strongly blent,
 Need opposite colours for their complement,
 And so too women whose ill-reasoning mind
 Requires some contradiction to be kind.

It is not enough in this late year of grace
 To answer fools with their own foolishness—
 Rather with your best wisdom. You will need
 Your folly to perplex some wiser head.
 And so my maxim is, whatever least
 Women expect, that thing will serve you best.
 Thus, with young souls in their first unfledged years,
 Ask their opinion as philosophers :
 Consult their knowledge in the ways of life.
 The repute of sin will please a too chaste wife.
 Your deference keep for harlots : these you touch
 Best by your modesty, which makes them blush.
 With a proud beauty deal out insolence,
 And bear her fence down with a stronger fence.
 She will be angry, but a softer cheek
 Turn to the smiter who has proved her weak.
 And so with wisdom : meet it with surprise,
 Laugh at it idly gazing in its eyes,
 Leave it no solid ground for its fair feet,
 And lead it lightly where love's waters meet.
 Even virtue—virtue of the noblest type,
 The fair sad woman, whose romance is ripe,
 Needs but a little knowledge to be led,
 Perhaps less than the rest if truth be said.
 You must not parley with her. Words are vain,
 And you might wake some half forgotten pain.
 Avoid her soul. It is a place too strong
 For your assaulting, and a siege were long.
 Others have failed before it. Touch it not,
 But march beyond, nor fire a single shot.
 The fields of pleasure less defended lie :
 These are your vantage-ground for victory.
 Strike boldly for possession and command ;
 An hour may win it, if you hold her hand.
 I knew one once : " . . .

I would have stopped him here
But for the shame which held me prisoner ;
And his undaunted reassuring smile,
Commanding confidence. “ I knew once on a while,”
He said, “ a woman whom the world called proud,
A saintly soul, untouched by the vain crowd,
Who had survived all battle, siege, and sack,
Love ever led with armies at his back,
Yet fell at last to the mere accident
Of a chance meeting, for another meant,
Her lover had not dared it, had he known,
But faces in the dark are all as one.
You know the rhyme.”

But at this point I rose,
Fearing what worse his folly might disclose,
And having learned my lesson of romance,
A sadder man and wiser for the chance,
Bade him good night : (it was in truth good-bye,
For pretexting next morning some small lie
Of business calling me in haste to town,
I fled the house). He looked me up and down,
Yawned, rose to light his candle at the lamp,
Pressed with warm hand my own hand which was damp,
And as he sauntered cheerily to bed,
I heard him sing—they linger in my head—
The first staves of a ballad, then the fashion
With the young bloods who shape their love and passion
At the music-halls of the Metropolis ;
What I remember of the song was this :

But, no, I cannot write it. There are things
Too bitter in their taste, and this one stings

My soul to a mad anger even yet.
I seem to hear the voices of the pit
Lewdly discoursing of incestuous scenes,
Bottom the weaver's and the enamoured queen's.
Alas, Titania ! thou poor soul, alas !
How art thou fallen, and to what an ass !

CHAPTER V

GRISELDA'S madness lasted forty days,
Forty eternities ! Men went their ways,
And suns arose and set, and women smiled,
And tongues wagged lightly in impeachment wild
Of Lady L.'s adventure. She was gone,
None knew by whom escorted or alone,
Or why or whither, only that one morning,
Without pretext, or subterfuge, or warning,
She had disappeared in silence from L. House,
Leaving her lord in multitudinous
And agonised conjecture of her fate :
So the tale went. And truly less sedate
Than his wont was in intricate affairs,
Such as his Garter or his lack of heirs,
Lord L. was seen in this new tribulation.
Griselda long had been his life's equation,
The pivot of his dealings with the world,
The mainstay of his comfort, all now hurled
To unforeseen confusion by her flight :
There was need of action swift and definite.
Where was she ? Who could tell him ? Divers visions
Passed through his fancy—thieves, and street collisions,
And all the hundred accidents of towns,
From broken axle trees to broken crowns.
In vain he questioned ; no response was made
More than the fact that, as already said,

My lady, unattended and on foot,
(A sad imprudence here Lord L. took note),
Had gone out dressed in a black morning gown
And dark tweed waterproof, 'twixt twelve and one,
Leaving no orders to her maid, or plan
About her carriage to or groom or man.
Such was in sum the downstairs' evidence.
The hall porter, a man of ponderous sense,
Averred her ladyship had eastward turned
From the front door, and some small credit earned
For the suggestion that her steps were bent
To Whitechapel on merciful intent,
A visit of compassion to the poor,
A clue which led to a commissioner
Being sent for in hot haste from Scotland Yard.
And so the news was bruited abroad.

It reached my ears among the earliest,
And from Lord L. himself, whose long suppressed
Emotion found its vent one afternoon
On me, the only listener left in town.
His thoughts now ran on "a religious craze
Of his poor wife's," he said, "in these last days
Indulged beyond all reason." The police
Would listen to no talk of casualties,
Still less of crime, since they had nothing found
In evidence above or under ground,
But held the case to be of simpler kind,
Home left in a disordered state of mind.
Lord L. had noticed, now they talked of it,
Temper less equable and flightier wit,
"A craving for religious services
And sacred music." Something was amiss,
Or why were they in London in September?
Griselda latterly, he could remember,

Had raved of a conventual retreat
In terms no Protestant would deem discreet
As the sole refuge in a world of sin
For human frailty, grief's best anodyne.
"The *Times* was right. Rome threatened to absorb us :
The convents must be searched by *habeas corpus*."

And so I came to help him. I had guessed
From his first word the vainness of his quest,
And half was moved to serve him in a strait
Where her fair fame I loved was in debate,
Yet held my peace, nor hazarded a word
Save of surprise at the strange case I heard,
Till, fortune aiding, I should find the clue
My heart desired to do what I would do.
And not in vain. Night found me duly sped,
Lord L.'s ambassador accredited,
With fullest powers to find and fetch her home,
If need should be, from the Pope's jaws in Rome.

Gods ! what a mission ! First my round I went
Through half the slums of Middlesex and Kent,
Surrey and Essex—this to soothe Lord L.,
Though witless all, as my heart told too well ;
The hospitals no less and casual wards,
Each house as idly as his House of Lords,
And only at the week's end dared to stop
At the one door I knew still housing hope,
Young Manton's chambers. There, with reddened cheek
I heard the answer given I came to seek.
Manton was gone, his landlady half feared
He too, in some mishap, and disappeared,—
Proof all too positive. His letters lay
A fortnight deep untouched upon the tray.

She could not forward them or risk a guess
As to his last or likeliest address.
He was in Scotland often at this season,
“ But not without his guns ”—a cogent reason.
And leaving, too, his valet here in town,
Perplexed of what to do or leave undone.
Abroad ? Perhaps. If so, his friends might try
As a best chance the Paris Embassy.
He had been there last Spring, and might be now.

Paris ! It was enough, I made my bow,
And took my leave. I seemed to touch the thread
Of the blind labyrinth 'twas mine to tread.
Where should they be, in truth, these too fond lovers,
But in the land of all such lawless rovers ?
The land of Gautier, Bourget, Maupassant,
Where still “ you can ” makes answer to “ I can't.”
The fair domain where all romance begins
In a light borderland of venial sins,
But deepening onwards, till the fatal day
Vice swoops upon us, plead we as we may.
Griselda's bonnet o'er the windmills thrown,
Had surely crossed the Seine ere it came down.
And I, if I would find and win her back,
Must earliest search the boulevards for her track.
And so to Paris in my zeal I passed,
Breaking my idol, mad Iconoclast.

There is a little inn by Meudon wood
Dear to Parisians in their amorous mood,
A place of rendezvous, where bourgeois meet
Their best beloved in congregation sweet ;
Clandestine, undisturbed, illicit loves, '
Made half romantic by the adjoining groves,

So beautiful in Spring, with the new green
 Clothing the birch stems scattered white between,
 Nor yet, in Autumn, when the first frosts burn
 And the wind rustles in the reddening fern,
 Quite robbed of sentiment for lovers' eyes,
 Who seek Earth's blessing on a bliss unwise,
 And find the happy sanction for their state
 In nature's face, unshocked by their debate,
 As who should say "Let preachers frown their fill,
 Here one approves. 'Tis Eden with us still."

Such fancy, may be, in her too fond heart
 Had led Griselda—with her friend—apart,
 Yet not apart, from the world's curious gaze,
 To this secluded, ill-frequented place :
 A compromise of wills and varying moods,
 His for gay crowds, her own for solitudes.
 Manton knew Paris well, and loved its noise,
 Its mirthful parody of serious joys,
 Its pomp and circumstance. His wish had been
 To flaunt the boulevards with his captured queen,
 And make parade of a last triumph won
 In the chaste field of prudish Albion,
 Outscandalising scandal. Love and he
 In any sense but of male vanity,
 And the delirium of adventures new
 In the world's eye—the thing he next should do—
 Were terms diverse and incompatible.
 Griselda, to his eyes was Lady L.,
 The fair, the chaste, the unapproached proud name
 Men breathed in reverence, woman, all the same,
 And not as such, and when the truth was said,
 Worth more than others lightlier credited.
 It all had been a jest from the beginning,
 A *tour de force*, whose wit was in the winning,

A stroke of fortune and of accident,
The embrace he had told of for another meant,
While she stood grieving for a first grey hair
(A psychologic moment) on the stair,
And, kneeling down, he had adored her foot,
The one weak spot where her self-love had root,
And laughed at her, and told her she was old,
Yet growing tenderer as he grew more bold.
And so from jest to jest, and chance to chance,
To that last scene at the mad country dance
Where she had played the hoyden, he the swain,
Pretending love till love was in their brain,
And he had followed to her chamber door,
And helped her to undo the dress she wore.

Then the elopement. That had been her doing,
Which he accepted to make good his wooing,
And careless what to both the result might be,
So it but served his end of vanity.
It all had been to this vain boy a whim,
Something grotesque, a play, a pantomime,
Where nothing had been serious but her heart,
And that was soon too tearful for its part.
He wearied in a week of her mature
Old maidish venturings in ways obscure,
Her agony of conscience dimly guessed,
The silences she stifled in her breast,
Her awkwardness—it was his word—in all
That love could teach ; her sighs funereal,
And more the unnatural laughter she essayed
To meet the doubtful sense of things he said.
She was at once too tender and too prim,
Too prudish and too crazed with love and him.
At a month's end his flame had leaped beyond
Already to friends frailer and less fond ;

The light Parisian world of venal charms
Which welcomed him with wide and laughing arms
There he was happier, more at home, more gay,
King of the "High Life," hero of the day.

Griselda, in her sad suburban nook
Watched his departures with a mute rebuke,
Ys^t daring not to speak. The choice was hers
To stay at home or run the theatres
With her young lover in such company
As her soul loathed. She had tried despairingly
To be one, even as these, for his loved sake,
And would have followed spite of her heart's ache,
But that he hardly further cared to press,
After one failure stamped with "dowdiness."
That too had been his word, a bitter word,
Biting and true, which smote her like a sword,
Or rather a whip's sting to her proud cheek,
Leaving her humbled, agonised and weak.

Poor beautiful Griselda ! What was now
The value of thy beauty, chaste as snow
In thy youth's morning, the unchallenged worth
Of thy eyes' kindness, queenliest of the earth ;
The tradition of thy Fra-angelic face,
Blessed as Mary's, and as full of grace ;
The fame which thou despisedst, yet which made
A glory for thee meet for thy dear head ?
What, if in this last crisis of thy fate,
When all a Heaven and Hell was in debate,
And thy archangel, with the feet of clay,
Stood mocking there in doubt to go or stay,
The unstable fabric of thy woman's dower,
Thy beauty, failed and left thee in *their* power

Whose only law of beauty was the sting
 Lent to man's lust by light bedizening ?
 What use was in thy beauty, if, alas !
 Thou gavest them cause to mock (those tongues of brass)
 At thy too crude and insular attire,
 Thy naïvetés of colour, the false fire
 Of thy first dallings with the red and white,
 Thy sweet pictorial robe, Pre-Raphaelite,
 Quaint in its tones and *outré* in design,
 Thy lack of unity and shape and line,
 Thy English angularity—who knows,
 The less than perfect fitting of thy shoes ?

Griselda, in her flight, had left behind
 All but the dress she stood in, too refined,
 In her fair righteousness of thought and deed,
 To make provision for a future need,
 However dire. She was no Israelite
 To go forth from her Pharaoh in the night,
 With spoils of the Egyptians in her hands,
 And had thrown herself on Manton and on France,
 With a full courage worth a nobler cause,
 Grandly oblivious of prudential laws.
 Her earliest trouble, marring even the bliss
 Of love's first ecstasy, had come of this,
 Her want of clothes—a worse and weightier care
 At the mere moment than her soul's despair
 For its deep fall from virtuous estate.
 How should she dress herself, she asked of Fate,
 With neither maid, nor money, nor a name ?
 It was her first experiment in shame.
 Now, after all her poor economies,
 This was the ending read in his vexed eyes,
 And spoken by his lips : her utmost art
 Had failed to please that idle thing, his heart,

Or even to avert his petulant scorn
For one so little to love's manner born.

And thus I found them, at the angry noon
Of their "red month," the next to honeymoon :
Two silent revellers at a loveless feast,
Scared by hate's morning breaking in their East—
A dawn which was of penance and despair,
With pleasure's ghost to fill the vacant chair.
I took it, and was welcomed rapturously,
As a far sail by shipwrecked souls at sea,
An opportune deliverer, timely sent
To break the autumn of their discontent,
And give a pretext to their need grown sore
Of issue from joys dead by any door.

Manton, all confidential from the first,
Told me the tale of his last sins and worst,
As meriting a sympathy not less
Than the best actions virtuous men confess.
He was overwhelmed with women and with debt—
Women who loved him, bills which must be met.
What could he do ? Her ladyship was mad—
It was her fault, not his, this escapade.
He had warned her from the first, and as a friend,
That all such frolics had a serious end,
And that to leave her home was the worst way
A woman would who wanted to be gay.

"For look," said he, "we men, who note these things,
And how the unthinking flutterers burn their wings,
Know that a woman, be she what she will,
The fairest, noblest, most adorable,
Dowered in her home with all seraphic charms,
Whom heaven itself might envy in your arms,

A paragon of pleasure undenied
At her own chaste respectable fireside,
Becomes, what shall I say, when she steps down
From the high world of her untouched renown ?
A something differing in no serious mood
From the sad rest of the light sisterhood ;
Perhaps indeed more troublesome than these,
Because she keenlier feels the agonies :
A wounded soul, who has not even the wit
To hide its hurt and make a jest of it ;
A maid of Astolat, launched in her barge,
A corpse on all the world, a *femme à charge*."

" 'Tis not," he argued, " our poor human sins
That make us what we are when shame begins,
But the world pointing at our naked state :
Then we are shocked and humbled at our fate,
Silent and shamed in all we honour most—
For what is virtue but the right to boast ?
A married woman's love, three weeks from home,
Is the absurdest thing in Christendom,
Dull as a *ménage* in the *demi-monde*
And dismaller far by reason of the bond.
All this I told my lady ere we went,
But warning wasted is on sentiment.
You see the net result here in one word,
A crying woman and a lover bored."

So far young Manton. She for whom I came,
Griselda's self, sweet soul, in her new shame
Essayed awhile to hide from me the truth
Of this last hap of her belated youth,
Her disillusion with her graceless lover.
She made sad cloaks for him which could not cover

His great unworthiness and her despair,
 All with a frightened half-maternal air,
 Most pitiful and touching. To my plea,
 Urging her home, she answered mournfully,
 That she was bound now to her way of life,
 And owed herself no less than as his wife
 To him she had chosen out of all mankind.
 'Twas better to be foolish, even blind,
 If ~~it~~ had faults, so she could serve him still—
 And this had been her promise and her will.
 She would not hear of duties owed elsewhere :
 What was she to Lord L., or he to her ?
 I need not speak of it. And yet she clung
 To my protecting presence in her wrong ;
 And once, when Manton's jibes made bitterer play,
 Implored me with appealing eyes to stay.
 And so I lingered on.

Those autumn days,
 Spent with Griselda in the woodland ways
 Of Meudon with her lover, or alone,
 When his mad fancies carried him to town,
 Remain to me an unsubstantial act
 Of dreaming fancy, rather than the fact
 Of any waking moment in my past,
 The sweetest, saddest and with her the last—
 For suddenly they ended.

We had been
 One Sunday for a jaunt upon the Seine,
 We two—in Manton's absence, now prolonged
 To a third night—and in a steamboat, thronged
 With idle bourgeois folk, whom the last glory,
 Of a late autumn had sent forth in foray

To Passy and St. Cloud, from stage to stage
 Had made with heavy souls our pilgrimage ;
 And homeward turning and with little zest,
 The fair day done, to love's deserted nest
 Had come with lagging feet and weary eyes,
 Expectant still of some new dark surprise,
 When the blow fell unsparing on her head,
 Already by what fortunes buffeted.

How did it happen, that last tragedy ?—
 For tragedy it was, let none deny,
 Though all ignoble. Every soul of us
 Touches one moment in death's darkened house
 The plane of the heroic, and compels
 Men's laughter into tears—ay, Heaven's and Hell's.
 How did it happen ? There was that upon
 Their faces at the door more than the tone
 Of their replies, that warned us of the thing
 We had not looked for in our questioning ;
 And our lips faltered, and our ears, afraid,
 Shrank from more hearing. What was it they said
 In their fool's jargon, that he lay upstairs ?
 He ? Manton ? The dispenser of our cares ?
 The mounteback young reveller ? Suffering ? Ill ?
 And she, poor soul, that suffered at his will !
 A sinister case ? Not dying ? Pitiful God !
 Truly Thou smitest blindly with Thy rod.
 For Manton was not worthy to die young,
 Beloved by her with blessings on her tongue.
 And such a cause of death !

She never heard
 The whole truth told, for each one spared his word,
 And he lay mute for ever. But to me
 The thing was storied void of mystery,

And thus they told it. Hardly had we gone
On our sad river outing, when from town
Manton had come with a gay troop of friends,
Such as the *coulisse* of the opera lends,
To breakfast at the inn and spend the day
In mirthful noise, as was his vagrant way.
A drunken frolic, and most insolent
To her whose honour with his own was blent,
To end in this last tragedy. None knew
Quite how it happened, or a cause could shew
Further than this, that, rising from the table,
The last to go with steps perhaps unstable—
For they had feasted freely, and the stair
Was steep and iron-edged, and needed care;
And singing, as he went, the selfsame song,
Which I remembered, to the laughing throng,
He had slipped his length, and fallen feet-first down.
When they picked him up his power to move was gone,
Though he could speak. They laid him on a bed,
Her bed, Griselda's, and called in with speed
Such help of doctors and commissioners
As law prescribed, and medicine for their fears.
'Twas his last night.

There, in Griselda's hands,
Young Jerry Manton lay with the last sands
Of his life's hour-glass trickling to its close,
Griselda watching, with what thoughts, God knows.
We did not speak. But her lips moved in prayer,
And mine too, in the way of man's despair.
I did not love him, yet a human pity
Softened my eyes. Afar, from the great city,
The sound came to us of the eternal hum,
Unceasing, changeless, pregnant with all doom

Of insolent life that rises from its streets,
 The pulse of sin which ever beats and beats,
 Wearing the ears of God. O Paris, Paris !
 What doom is thine for every soul that tarries
 Too long with thee, a stranger in thy arms.
 Thy smiles are incantations, thy brave charms
 Death to thy lovers. Each gay mother's son,
 Smitten with love for thee, is straight undone.
 And lo the chariot wheels upon thy ways !
 And a new garland hung in, *Père la Chaise* !

Poor soul ! I turned and looked into the night,
 Through the uncurtained windows, and there bright
 Saw the mute twinkle of a thousand stars.
 One night ! the least in all time's calendars,
 Yet fraught with what a meaning for this one !
 One star, the least of all that million !
 One room in that one city ! Yet for him
 The universe there was of space and time.
 What were his thoughts ? In that chaotic soul,
 Home of sad jests, obscene, unbeautiful,
 Mired with the earthiest of brute desires,
 And lit to sentience only with lewd fires,
 Was there no secret, undisturbed, fair place
 Watered with love and favoured with God's grace
 To which the wounded consciousness had fled
 For its last refuge from a world of dread ?
 Was his soul touched to tenderness, to awe,
 To softer recollection ? All we saw
 Was the maimed body gasping forth its breath,
 A rigid setting of the silent teeth,
 And the hands trembling. Death was with us there.
 But where was he ? O Heaven of pity ! where ?

We watched till morning by the dying man,
 She weeping silently, I grieved and wan,

And still he moved not. But with the first break
Of day in the window panes we saw him make
A sign as if of speaking. Pressing near—
For his lips moved, Griselda deemed, in prayer—
We heard him make profession of his faith,
As a man of pleasure face to face with death,
A kind of gambler's Athanasian Creed,
Repeated at the hour of his last need.
"Five sovereigns," said he, steadying his will,
As in defiance of death's power to kill,
And with that smile of a superior mind,
Which was his strength in dealing with mankind,
The world of sporting jargon and gay livers.
"Five sovereigns is a fiver, and five fivers
A pony, and five ponies are a hundred—
No, four," he added, seeing he had blundered.
"*Four* to the hundred and *five* centuries
Make up the monkey." From his dying eyes
The smile of triumph faded. "There, I've done it,"
He said, "but there was no great odds upon it,
You see with a broken back."

He spoke no more,
And in another hour had passed the door
Which shuts the living from eternity.
Where was he? God of pity, where was he?

This was the end of Lady L.'s romance.

When we had buried him (as they do in France,
In a tomb inscribed "*à perpétuité*,"
Formally rented till the Judgment Day),
She put off black, and shed no further tears;
Her face for the first time showed all its years,

But not a trace beyond. Without demur
 She gave adhesion to my plans for her,
 And we went home to London and Lord L.,
 Silent together, by the next night's mail.
 She had been six weeks away.

The interview

Between them was dramatic. I, who knew
 Her whole mad secret, and had seen her soul
 Stripped of its covering, and without control,
 Bowed down by circumstance and galled with shame,^f
 Yielding to wounds and griefs without a name,
 Had feared for her a wild unhappy scene.
 I held Lord L. for the least stern of men,
 And yet I dared not hope even he would crave
 No explanation ere he quite forgave.

I was with them when they met, unwilling third,
 In their mute bandying of the unspoken word.
 Lord L. essayed to speak. I saw his face
 Made up for a high act of tragic grace
 As he came forward. It was grave and mild,
 A father's welcoming a truant child,
 Forgiving, yet intent to mark the pain
 With hope "the thing should not occur again."
 His lips began to move as to some speech
 Framed in this sense, as one might gently preach
 A word in season to too gadding wives
 Of duties owed, at least by those whose lives
 Moved in high places. But it died unsaid.
 There was that about Griselda that forbade
 Marital questionings. Her queenly eyes
 Met his with a mute answer of surprise,
 Marking the unseemliness of all display
 More strongly than with words, as who should say

Noblesse oblige. She took his outstretched hand,
And kissed his cheek, but would not understand
A word of his reproaches. Even I,
With my full knowledge and no more a boy,
But versed by years in the world's wickedness,
And open-eyed to her, alas ! no less
Than to all womanhood, even I felt shame,
And half absolved her in my mind from blame.
And he, how could he less ? He was but human,
The fortunate husband of how fair a woman !
He stammered his excuses.

What she told
When I had left them (since all coin is gold
To those who would believe, and who the key
Hold of their eyes, in blind faith's alchemy)
I never learned.

I did not linger on,
Seeing her peril past and the day won,
But took my leave. She led me to the door
With her old kindness of the days of yore,
And thanked me as one thanks for little things.
“ You have been,” she said, “ an angel without wings,
And I shall not forget,—nor will Lord L. ;
And yet,” she said, with an imperceptible
Change in her voice, “ there are things the world will s
Which are neither just nor kind, and, if to-day
We part awhile, remember we are friends,
If not now later. Time will make amends,
And we shall meet again.” I pressed her hand
A moment to my lips. “ I understand,”
I said, and gazed a last time in her eyes ;
“ Say all you will. I am your sacrifice.”

And so, in truth, it was. Henceforth there lay
A gulf between us, widening with delay,
And which our souls were impotent to pass,
The gulf of a dead secret ; and, alas !
Who knows what subtle treacheries within,
For virtue rends its witnesses of sin,
And hearts are strangely fashioned by their fears.
We met no more in friendship through the years,
Although I held her secret as my own,
And fought her battles, her best champion,
On many a stricken field in scandal's war,
Till all was well forgotten. From afar
I watched her fortunes still with tenderness,
Yet sadly, as cast out of Paradise.
For ever, spite her promise, from that day,
When I met L., he looked another way ;
And she, Griselda, was reserved and chill.
I had behaved, her women friends said, ill,
And caused a needless scandal in her life,
—They told not what. Enough, that as a wife
She had been compelled to close her doors on me,
And that her lord knew all the iniquity.

And so I bore the burden of her sin.

What more shall I relate ? The cynic vein
Has overwhelmed my tale, and I must stop.
Its heroine lived to justify all hope
Of her long-suffering lord, that out of pain
Blessings would grow, and his house smile again
With the fulfilled expectance of an heir.
Griselda sat no longer in despair,
Nor wasted her full life on dreams of folly ;
She had little time for moods of melancholy,

Or heart to venture further in love's ways ;
She was again the theme of all men's praise,
And suffered no man's passion. Once a year,
In the late autumn, when the leaves grew sere
She made retreat to a lay sisterhood,
And lived awhile there for her soul's more good,
In pious meditation, fasts and prayer.
Some say she wore concealed a shirt of hair
Under her dresses, even at court balls,
And certain 'tis that all Rome's rituals
Were followed daily at the private Mass
In her new chauntry built behind Hans Place.
Lord L. approved of all she did, even this,
Strange as it seemed to his old-fashionedness.

He, gentle soul, grown garrulous with years,
Prosed of her virtues to all listeners,
And of their son's, the child of his old age,
A prodigy of beauty and ways sage.
It was a vow, he said, once made in Rome,
Had brought them their chief treasure of their home.
A vow ! The light world laughed—for miracles
Are not believed in now, except as Hell's.
And yet the ways of God are passing strange.
And this is certain (and therein the range
Of my long tale is reached, and I am free),
—There is at Ostia, close beside the sea,
A convent church, the same where years ago
Griselda kneeled in tears and made her vow ;
And in that shrine, beneath the crucifix,
They show a votive offering, candlesticks
Of more than common workmanship and size,
And underneath inscribed the votary's
Name in initials, and the date, all told,
Hall-marked in England, and of massive gold.

NATALIA'S RESURRECTION

A SONNET SEQUENCE

NATALIA'S RESURRECTION

I

OH ! woe is me for beauty idly blown !
And woe for passionate youth and joys that wait !
And woe for foolish love that is undone
By woman's fear, and fortune come too late !
And woe for empty words and hours that were
Squandered in weeping ! Woe, because of Death
Who was at hand, and, while joy languished near
Fearing to enter, quickly from its sheath
Drew out his sword and laid its point unto
That virgin breast, and there in stern embrace
Did all that happiness had dared not do,
Rifling the treasures of that holy place,
And heeding not Love's shriek. Alas, poor Love !
Death will not spare what thou hast spared to prove.

II

'Twas thus with my Natalia, suppliant soul,
Who loved young Adrian to her heart's despite,
And loved him dearly, yet could not cajole
Her fears of ill nor use her woman's right
To grant his wish, but ever put away
The sweet fulfilment of each day's desire
To a new to-morrow void as yesterday.
Adrian in vain, with wild hopes high and higher,
Essayed to make her convert to his creed.
No laggard he to do, devise or dare.
But still she failed him ever at his need,
And still she gave but tears to his heart's prayer.
And days and nights went cheerless for them both,
And not a flower was gathered of love's troth.

III

Matron was she of a great Roman house,
And wed in youth to one she might not love ;
Her birth, her fortune, her name luminous,
Such as all noblest virtues most behove.
How dare she trifle with ignoble things,
Or yield her fair fame to a stranger's care,
Or let her passionate desire take wings,
Or be of those unchastely debonnaire ?
Yet with him she was well, and far from him
A bird shaft-stricken which no more may fly.
She deemed his smile as of the seraphim,
And in his frown she was one like to die.
For his dear sake 'twixt niggard hopes and fears
She lived in death for two long weary years.

IV

But Adrian, who was young and all athirst
For human joy, and turbulent and strong,
Grew discontent with her despairs and curst,
Nor spared he her the jibings of his tongue.
He mocked at her vain virtue and the words
She used to comfort him when sometimes she
With weak heart battling, like a troubled bird's
Which sees the nets, would ease his misery
With telling her own pain and making show
Of her soul's hunger to his hungry soul.
It only angered him, this prate of woe,
And back he thrust on her her beggar's dole
Of idle sighs. And "If I have not bread,
For pity let me be and starve," he said.

V

Until it happened, as such things will be,
That she, who had a proud man for her spouse
None the less loving that unloved was he,
Must bear a child, the heir to his high house.
Then Adrian left her. It was idle sorrow
Longer to wait a suppliant at her door,
Weeping the promise of a lost to-morrow
Which never could be his nor valued more.
And he was tired of tears and nightly needed
To feed his manhood's strength on stronger meat,
And neither word of hers nor vow he heeded,
Who was thus proved a daughter of deceit ;
And he was wrath with her and womanhood,
And with himself, and chiefly wrath with God.

VI

So he departed angry and in haste,
A bitter wanderer on the ways of life :
He cared not whither so he found a feast
Spread for his hunger which should need no strife.
He went out silent, scornful and alone,
That none might pity him. He would not make
Of his too public grief a public moan,
Nor yet feign laughter for his manhood's sake,
For now that love was lost he less had heart
To cast his pride too on the dunghill there,
And his were griefs where none could bear a part,
And his a cup of pain no lips could share.
He went his way, to Germany some said,
And some to Naples, some that he was dead.

VII

But where he fared and how, it matters not.
He and his mourning ere a month had run
Were out of mind with all and clean forgot,
Kinsman and friend and foe : save only one,
Only Natalia. She with tightened breath
Heard his name spoken in reproof's vain way
And gave her melancholy soul to death.
Foolish Natalia, who in love's full day
Had spent her grief, had nothing now to give
Of greater woe to her soul's agonies.
Living she yet had hardly dared to live.
She had wept dry the fountains of her eyes,
And never on her sorrow broke a gleam
Of that assuagement tears on others stream.

VIII

And so it was that, sitting ever thus
Dumb to all speech of those that knew her woe
And bare with her sole sorrow in the house,
And ever watching with sad eyes below
To see if any came with help for her
Whom none could help with pity or with pride
Or word of patience, ere her time was near,
She bore her yet unliving child and died.
There was great mourning for her in those days
Because of her high lineage and fair youth.
Men knowing her spoke nobly in her praise,
Or knowing not yet mourned for very ruth.
And all Rome wept for her, and far and wide
The fame was noised how of her love she died.

IX

Thus Adrian learned it. And behold, his heart,
Which he had hardened against all dismay,
And wrapped up secretly and laid apart
As something which should not be used to-day,
Woke with a pang, and tremulously wan
Started and listened. There in the new morn
Of this grey wakening, like a long drowned man
Brought back to life, he knew the world forlorn
By the dull ache which was in every limb.
The ghastly pleasures which had gorged his care
Paled as he looked at them. His dead lusts dim
Stank like lost corpses in the morning air.
And yet 'twas passing sweet, despite the pain,
To feel and move and live and love again.

X

But with full daylight finding no relief,
Though he had spent the newness of his fears
And looked with altered eyes upon his grief,
For sorrow often drowns in its tears,
And men sleep deepest on a wound, he rose
And taking horse made in all haste for Rome,
Thinking if thus he might assuage his woes
By visiting his dead Natalia's tomb
And asking of her dear new-buried lips
What secret thought had been of love and him
When the world left her in its last eclipse.
And still in passionate words he made his theme,
That she was waiting yet to hear his cry :
“ O my soul's soul, I did not bid thee die.”

XI

So in his agony at noon he came,
On the third day, to where without the walls
Stood San Lorenzo with its front of flame,
Where mourners wait the accustomed funerals.
Here to a cypress having tied his steed,
He lighted down sore weary on the grass,
Seeking such comfort for his body's need
As rest could lend till the day's heat should pass
And no man stopped him, either friend or foe
Or knight or citizen or friar or priest ;
Nor sought he more companionship of woe
Than the dumb presence of his jaded beast.
There, hidden in the shade where he had crept,
Adrian o'erspent with sorrow soundly slept.

XII

He slept as only under the free heaven
It is given to sleep, a slumber shadowless
As the broad river to whose banks at even
That spirit comes which brings forgetfulness,
A silence undisturbed by the world's tread,
Which sees not, hears not, feels not, yet is girt
With sound and light and sense; which seeming dead
Drinks in Earth's life in cure of every hurt
And so takes consolation. Dreams anon
Come for the soul's refreshment, apparitions
Begot of heaven's beauty and the sun,
No meaningless expectance of sad visions
But tales prophetic of new days more fair
And to be numbered with the things that are,

XIII

A heritage for ever. Such a sleep
Came upon Adrian and such a dream,
As in the shade he lay a weary heap.
For, while he rested, still it seemed to him
He rode towards the city of his love,
Only in mirth not sadness. And, behold,
In his soothed bosom Hope, a brooding dove,
Had made again her nest, and manifold
Fair pleasures round him seemed to perch and sing
Like wild birds in the branches overhead,
And his heart leaped in joy with everything,
As in the days ere yet his joys were dead,
Until he found himself, it seemed, in Rome
And knocking at the doors of his own home.

XIV

His servants opened. None appeared to doubt
How it might happen their young lord stood there,
But led him in. The house as for a rout
Stood swept and garnished and exceeding fair.
Adrian's strange eyes, long widowed of the sight,
Found all things larger, nobler and more proud
Than on the day he left them in his flight,
A love-sick boy by a long sorrow bowed.
And still through halls and corridors he went
And found new treasures still at every door,
Mirrors and silks and fretwork excellent,
And panelled tapestry and marbled floor.
He paused in wonder and delight at each,
Pleased to his soul to find himself thus rich.

XV

Anon, ere yet his pleasure was aware
Of other presence with him in that place,
A growing murmur in the jubilant air,
With hum of voices gathering apace,
And laughter interchanged, and tones well known,
And steps approaching him familiar-wise,
And names that seemed an echo of his own,
Broke on his musing. Turning in surprise
He saw around him a gay company,
Faces of kinsmen or of friends as near,
But dead or changed or wed : all now in joy,
Such as they showed him once in days more dear
Ere yet his manhood had been touched with pain,
Stood forth to greet him to their hearts again.

XVI

Among the rest ('twas thus his dream went on
While Adrian slept) in more than courteous mood
And smiling welcome, fairer scarce was none,
That noble knight Natalia's husband stood,
A gentle man whom of a truth in life,
Alas for jealous youth and wit too keen !
Adrian loved little though he loved his wife,
But now beheld as the most blest of men,—
Because Natalia was not dead, he thought,
Seeing him thus unconscious of all grief,—
And in that cloudless face where pain was not
Adrian found omen to his soul's relief,
And looked beyond if haply he should see
Her face too following fixed in constancy.

XVII

Nor yet in vain. For to him through the rout
Behold, 'mid herald whispers of her name
And laughing eyes and welcome hands held out,
Natalia's self behind her husband came,
Her face arrayed in smiles, as who should say
She held a secret string of happiness
Joined to her heart grief could not take away.
And Adrian gazed at her in rapturous bliss,
Knowing his love had triumphed o'er the grave
And she at last was his, a heritage
For ever for his heart to hold and have,
In spite of change and death's untimely rage
And the long tempest of forgotten tears,
The pain, the anger and the grief of years.

XVIII

Nor were the rest astonished. Even he,
Natalia's lord, in all complacent grace
Looked on approving of her act when she
Stepped forward with her face to Adrian's face,
And touched his lips and told him of the truth
How all was ended now of her old life,
With the sad barrier that had marred their youth
Husband no longer and no longer wife,
Natalia had grown free. Then the proud lover
Gave thanks to God and took her arm in his,
Fearless how now their love they should discover
To any anger of suspicious eyes,
And led her forth his bride before them all
With solemn music to the banquet-hall.

XIX

And still the music sounded near and near,
Loud and more loud on Adrian's nuptial way,
Preluding soft, as 'twere a dulcimer,
But gathering strength and volume with delay,
And sadness too. In truth, as strange a chaunt
As ever bridegroom's ear might choose to know,
Or lover's voice to listening lover vaunt, '
(Thus Adrian argued in his dream) for, lo,
The dirge resolved itself to words of pain,
And "Miserere mei Domine"
Became the burden of its dolorous strain,
Till the love faded from Natalia's glee,
And with a sudden shudder in the sun
Adrian awoke and his brave dream was done.

XX

Oh, pitiful awaking ! What was Adrian's pleasure,
That it had earned for him such bitterness ?
What his soul's pride that its new tender measure
Should find its echo in a dirge like this ?
The chaunters chaunting slow were sable priests
Robed for a requiem ; the laughs clear,
Women that wept ; the untasted marriage feasts,
Death's banquet spread, and she upon the bier,
Natalia's self in her white robe of death,
Mourned by the hard eyes of unfriendly men,
And with them he, her husband, with set teeth
And visage pale which ne'er should smile again
In any welcome. Adrian neither moved
Nor spoke, but gazed upon the form he loved.

XXI

But when they had gone past him every one,
With new resolve begotten of his dream,
Adrian arose and followed where the stone
Yawned for his love, and there unseen by them
In the dark chauntry he beheld them lay
Her body in the grave with his own heart.
A bitter jest it seemed to him that they
Should all stand near and only he apart,
And through his soul a wind of anger swept
When any in the sad crowd chanced to be
Betwixt him and the woman, he so wept,
And oftentimes he cursed them bitterly
That hands not his should touch her in the tomb,
Waiting till night and his revenge should come.

XXII

The thought of night consoled him. To his vision
Natalia was dead only in false death,
The sleeping treason of some false misprision,
Some silent mystery of shortened breath,
Not dead in truth for ever and to him,
Or to that other life his dream foretold :—
Her murderers these. And in his heart the whim
Rose he should draw her from her cincture cold,
And set his lips upon her lips once more,
And free her spirit thus from its dull trance,
And all should be between them as before,
Only more dear for her deliverance.
And darkly there he smiled as, their work done,
The mourners left him with their dead alone.

XXIII

But, when the church was hushed in the night wind,
And all were gone who might his zeal disclaim,
Or hinder the firm purpose of his mind,
A silent man among the tombs he came,
Stooping to listen if so be some sound
Of living thing with speech or power to breathe
Should issuant be from the dark underground,—
And last to hers. There on that home of death
He kneeled him down and called aloud to her,
“ Natalia, O Natalia, my beloved,
Am I not here thy soul's petitioner
Whom thou so lovedst ? ” And around him moved
The phantoms of the night. And the wind's sigh
Answered his prayer, “ Beloved, it is I.”

XXIV

And, feeling round him, lo, upon the mould
A pick and spade cast down by accident.
And Adrian laughed when in those engines cold
He guessed the furtherers of his heart's intent.
And all night through he wrought with them in rage,
As miners do who know the prize at hand.
Blest Adrian ! Now thy lips thou shalt engage
In the full solace thy long love has planned.
Her face is near thee. Speed thee on thy task.
Her breast's fair purity is thine to kiss.
She shall not now deny though thou shouldst ask
Her whole soul's prize in ransom of thy bliss.
Thrice happy Adrian ! See, thy hands have slid
Trembling on thy Natalia's coffin lid.

XXV

Oh, miracle of love ! That death, which seems
So hard a master when he holds his prize,
Whom no cajoleries, nor stratagems
Of beauty's power, nor wisdom's sophistries,
E'er turned aside from his appointed way,
But falcon-like, who with relentless foot
And pinions spread above his captured prey,
Holds his high way in heaven absolute,
Nor heeds our questionings : that this same death
Should have grown soft and yielded to love's tears,
And drawn his talons from their fleshly sheath,
And spared awhile his harvest of the years !
Oh, miracle in sooth renowned above
All other wonders of miraculous love !

XXVI

Yet so it was. Adrian had hardly set
His lips to those cold lips where death had been,
His eyes those clammy eyelids scarce had wet
With his warm tears and poured his soul between,
Nor yet with eager hands had he undone
That bosom's fastness of its snowy fold,
Ere, lo, on his rapt ear there fell a moan
As of one waking in the night grown cold.
And, even as he held her in his arms,
And gazed into her face by the dim light,
He saw her blue eyes open in alarms,
As wondering who was with her in the night,
And a long shudder pass through all her frame,
And her lips move as half she breathed his name.

XXVII

She wakes, she breathes, she rises from her bed,
That bed of death where she has lain so long ;
The flowers they set there fall from her fair head
Withered, while she, sweet soul, has known no wrong.
Forth from her grave miraculously white,
And all unstained by the dull earth's decay,
Natalia rises, a last star of night,
Just as the dawn is breaking into day.
Upon the stones they kneeled them down and prayed,
For hearts grow soft with a long danger past,
And both were young and for a while dismayed
At their great joy nor deemed they held it fast ;
Then, having kissed and wept, they turned to go
Through the dark church with faltering steps and slow.

XXVIII

Away ! Away ! Away with her, young lover,
Away with her in haste lest dawn should break ;
If that her kinsmen should thy deed discover
Ill might it fare with thee for her love's sake.
Away with her to thine own palace walls,
Where thou shalt cherish her, and none may know.
Thy grief alone in those sad funerals
Was left behind and thou art quit of woe.
Oh, happy bridal ! Now let songs be sung,
Lead forth the dances, let the minstrels play,
Bring her thou lovest thy own kith among,
A stranger bride, and who shall say thee nay ?
Death's mighty river whoso hath passed through
Stands clear of blame, do fate what it may do.

XXIX

He bore her to his home 'twixt life and death,
By mute connivance of the slumbering streets,
Bore her redeemed to a new world of breath
And peace divine, belike the Paraclete's.
There lay she in his hands for many days
Speechless, unasking,—only in her soul
The wonder grew at love's mysterious ways
Which had outwitted grief and proved her fool.
Ay, fool in sooth, unblest by her own will,
Yet now by chiding of love's guidance blest,
Who, sparing all, of all now found her fill,
And lost to love was now of love the guest.
Dreaming she lay, with visions in her eyes
Of a new world where women all were wise.

XXX

Thus was Natalia loved and lost and won.
Some say that Adrian, having gained the goal
Of his long hopes, and being of those who run
Too lightly for their constancy of soul,
Or finding maybe that in spite of fate
She he had saved from death was ill at ease,
And halted still in doubt 'twixt this and that,
Grudging her frightened stul its ecstasies,
At a high feast in presence of her kin
Gave back Natalia to her husband's care :
A fair resolve, mayhap, and lesser sin,
If that sin be which love hath made so fair.
Yet do I doubt me all so blindly ended,
Since both from Adam were and Eve descended.

XXXI

Rather I hold with those that tell it thus,
That they, who had made proof of their great faith,
Were joined no less with honour in love's house
By Holy Church, which binding looseneth,
Since it is written that 'twixt maid and man
The wedded contract joining hand and heart
For this life is and passeth not the span
Of victor death which all our bonds doth part.
And it were grievous one should suffer all,
Even death's last pang and an untimely grave,
If overcoming he again should fall
Prisoner to penance and to sorrow slave.
Ah, no ! They' lived the life their love had given,
And we too all, so grant it kindly Heaven !

A NEW PILGRIMAGE

A SONNET SEQUENCE

1887

A NEW PILGRIMAGE

CARE killed a cat, and I have cares at home,
Which vex me nightly and disturb my bed.
The things I love have all grown wearisome ;
The things that loved me are estranged or dead.
I have a house most fair, but tenanted
With shadows only, gardens of tall trees,
Fenced in and made secure from every dread
But this one terror, my soul's lack of ease.
I have much wealth of pleasure, horse and hound,
Woods broad for sport, and fields that are my own,
With neighbours of good cheer to greet me round,
And servants tried by whom my will is done.
Here all things live at peace in this dear place,
All but my pride, which goes companionless.

II

How shall I ransom me ? The world without,
Where once I lived in vain expense and noise,
Say, shall it welcome me in this last rout,
Back to its bosom of forgotten joys ?
Sometimes I hear it whispering with strange voice,
Asking, " Are we forever then cast out,
The things that helped thee once in thy annoys,
That thou despairest ? Nay, away with doubt !
Take courage to thy heart to heal its woes.
It still shall beat as wildly as a boy's."
This tempts me in the night-time, and I loose
My soul to dalliance with youth's broken toys.
Ay, wherefore suffer ? In this question lies
More than my soul can answer, and be wise.

III

I will break through my bondage. Let me be
Homeless once more, a wanderer on the Earth,
Marked with my soul's sole care for company,
Like Cain, lest I do murder on my hearth.
I ask not others' goods, nor wealth nor worth,
Nor the world's kindness, which should comfort me,
But to forget the story of my birth,
And go forth naked of all name, but free.
Where the flowers blow, there let me sit and dream.
Where the rain falls, ah ! leave my tears their way.
Where men laugh loud, I too will join the hymn,
And in God's congregation let me pray.
Only alone—I ask this thing—alone,
Where none may know me, or have ever known.

IV

Behold the deed is done. Here endeth all
That bound my grief to its ancestral ways.
I have passed out, as from a funeral,
From my dead home, and in the great world's gaze
Henceforth I stand, a pilgrim of new days,
On the high road of life. Where I was thrall,
See, I am master, being passionless ;
And, having nothing now, am lord of all.
How glorious is the world ! Its infinite grace
Surprises me—and not as erst with fear,
But as one meets a woman face to face,
Loved once and unforgotten and still dear
In certain moods and seasons. So to me
The fair world smiles to-day, yet leaves me free.

V

The physical world itself is a fair thing
For who has eyes to see or ears to hear.
To-day I fled on my new freedom's wind,
With the first swallows of the parting year,
Southwards from England. At the Folkestone pier
I left the burden of my sins behind,
Noting how gay the noon was, and how clear
The tide's fresh laughter rising to no wind.
A hundred souls of men there with my own
Smiled in that sunshine. 'Tis a little measure
Makes glad the heart at sea, and not alone
Do wise men kindle to its pulse of pleasure
Here all alike, peers, pedlars, squires, and dames
Forswore their griefs fog-born of Father Thames.

VI

Away from sorrow ! Yes, indeed, away !

Who said that care behind the horseman sits ?

The train to Paris, as it flies to-day,

Whirls its bold rider clear of ague fits.

Who stops for sorrows ? Who for his lost wits,

His vanished gold, his loves of yesterday,

His vexed ambitions ? See, the landscape flits

Bright in his face, and fleetier far than they.

Away ! away ! Our mother Earth is wide ;

And our poor lives and loves of what avail ?

All life is here ; and here we sit astride

On her broad back, with Hope's white wings for sail,

In search of fortune and that glorious goal,

Paris, the golden city of our soul.

VII

Ah, Paris, Paris ! What an echo rings

Still in those syllables of vain delight !

What voice of what dead pleasures on what wings

Of Mænad laughters pulsing through the night !

How bravely her streets smile on me ! How bright

Her shops, her houses, fair sepulchral things,

Stored with the sins of men forgotten quite,

The loves of mountebanks, the lusts of kings !

What message has she to me on this day

Of my new life ? Shall I, a pilgrim wan,

Sit at her board and revel at her play,

As in the days of old ? Nay, this is done.

It cannot be ; and yet I love her well

With her broad roads and pleasant paths to Hell.

VIII

I will sit down awhile in dalliance

With my dead life, and dream that it is young.
My earliest memories have their home in France,
The chestnut woods of Bearn and streams among,
Where first I learned to stammer the French tongue.
Fair ancient France. No railroad insolence
Had mixed her peoples then, and still men clung
Each to his ways, and viewed the world askance.
We, too, as exiles from our northern shore,
Surveyed things sparsely ; and my own child's scorn
Remained, how long, a rebel to all lore
Save its lost English, nor was quite o'erborne
Till, as I swore I'd speak no French frog's word,
I swore in French, and so laid down my sword.

IX

These were in truth brave days. From our high perch,
The box-seat of our travelling chariot, then
We children spied the world 'twas ours to search,
And mocked like birds at manners and at men.
What wonders we beheld, Havre, Rouen, Caen,
The Norman caps, the Breton crowds in church,
The loyal Loire, the valorous Vendéen,
And all the Revolution left in lurch
That very year—things old as Waterloo.

But when we neared the mountains crowned with snows,
And heard the torrents roar, our wonder grew
Over our wit, and a new pleasure rose
Wild in our hearts, and stopped our tongues with dread,
The sense of death and beauty overhead.

X

Whence is our pleasure in things beautiful ?

We are not born with it, we do not know,
By instinct of the eye or natural rule,
That naked rocks are fairest, or flowers blow
Best in their clefts, or that the world of snow
Has other glory than of cold and ice.

From our mother's hand we viewed these things below
Senseless as goats which browse a precipice,
Till we were taught to know them. With what tears

I con the lessons now I learned so well,
Of mountain shapes, from those dead lips of hers ;
And as she spoke, behold, a miracle
Proving her words,—for at our feet there grew,
Beauty's last prodigy, a gentian blue.

XI

I have it still, a book with pages sewn

Cross-wise in silk, and brimming with these flowers,
Treasures we gathered there, long sere and brown,
The ghosts of childhood's first undoubting hours,
Of childhood in the mountains ere the powers
Of wrong and pain had turned our joys to gall.

That summer stands to me a tower of towers,
To which my gladness clings in spite of all.
There was one special wonder in the hills,

A place where nets were hung from tree to tree
For flights of pigeons. This beyond all else

Touched my boy's fancy for its mystery,
And for the men who, caged aloft on poles,
Scared down the birds, as Satan scares men's souls.

XII

Dear royal France ! I fix the happy year
At forty-seven, because that Christmas-tide
There passed through Pau the Duke of Montpensier,
Fresh from his nuptials with his Spanish bride ;
And because I, unwilling, shared their pride,
As youngest of the English children there,
By offering flowers to the fair glorified
Daughter of Bourbon standing on the stair—
A point in history. When we came at last
To this gay Paris I was doomed to love,
There were already rumours of the blast
That swept the Orleans songsters from their grove
In flight to London, after Polignac
And the true king, at their King Bourgeois' back.

XIII

And what strange sights have these threewindows seen,
Mid *bonnes* and children, in the Tuileries !
What flights of hero, Emperor and Queen,
Since first I looked down from them, one of these !
Here, with his Mornys and his Persignys,
Louis Napoleon, the Prince President,
Rode one December past us, on the breeze
Of his new glory, bloodstained and intent.
Later, I too my love's diplomacies
Played at Eugenia's court,—blest Empress ! Then
How did men curse her with their Marseillaise,
When the foe's horse was watered in her Seine,
And the flames, lit for her last festival,
Licked out her palace and its glories all.

XIV

To-day there is no cloud upon thy face,
 Paris, fair city of romance and doom !
 Thy memories do not grieve thee, and no trace
 Lives of their tears for us who after come.
 All is forgotten—thy high martyrdom,
 Thy rage, thy vows, thy vauntings, thy disgrace,
 With those who died for thee to beat of drum,
 And those who lived to see thee kingdomless.
 Indeed thou art a woman in thy mirths,
 A woman in thy griefs which leave thee young,
 A prudent virgin still, despite the births
 Of these sad prodigies thy bards have sung.
 What to thy whoredoms is a vanished throne ?
 A chair where a fool sat, and he is gone !

XV

For thus it is. You flout at kings to-day.
 To-morrow in your pride you shall stoop low
 To a new tyrant who shall come your way,
 And serve him meekly with mock-serious brow,
 While the world laughs. I shall not laugh at you.
 Your Bourbon, Bonaparte or Boulanger
 Are foils to your own part of *ingénue*
 Which moves me most, the moral of your play.
 You have a mission in the world, to teach
 All pride its level. Poet, prince and clown,
 Each in your amorous arms has scaled the breach
 Of his own pleasure and the world's renown.
 Till with a yawn you turn, and from your bed
 Kick out your hero with his ass's head.

XVI

Gods, what a moral ! Yet in vain I jest.

The France which has been, and shall be again,
Is the most serious, and perhaps the best,

Of all the nations which have power with men.

France only of the nations has this plain
Thought in the world, to scorn hypocrisy,

And by this token she shall purge the stain
Of her sins yet, though these as scarlet be.

Let her put off her folly ! 'Tis a cloak

Which hides her virtue. Let her foremost stand,
The champion of all necks which feel the yoke,

As once she stood sublime in every land.

Let her forgo her Tonquins, and make good

Her boast to man, of man's high brotherhood !

XVII

For lo ! the nations, the imperial nations

Of Europe, all imagine a vain thing,
Sitting thus blindly in their generations,

Serving an idol for their God and King.

Blindly they rage together, worshipping
Their lusts of cunning, and their lusts of gold ;

Trampling the hearts of all too weak to bring
Alms to their Baal which is bought and sold.

And lo ! there is no refuge, none but Baal

For man's best help, and the mute recreant earth
Drinks in its children's blood, and hears their wail,

And deals no vengeance on its last foul birth ;

And there is found no hand to ward or keep
The weak from wrong, and Pity is asleep,

XVIII

Therefore do thou at least arise and warn,
Not folded in thy mantle, a blind seer,
But naked in thy anger, and new-born,
As in the hour when thy voice sounded clear
To the world's slaves, and tyrants quaked for fear.
Thou hadst a message then, a word of scorn,
First for thyself, thy own crimes' challenger,
And next for those who withered in thy dawn.
An hundred years have passed since that fair day,
And still the world cries loud, in its desire,
That right is wronged, and force alone has sway.
What profit are they, thy guns' tongues of fire ?
Nay, leave to England her sad creed of gold ;
Plead thou Man's rights, clean-handed as of old.

XIX

Alas, that words like these should be but folly !
Behold, the Boulevard mocks, and I mock too.
Let us away and purge our melancholy
With the last laughter at the Ambigu !
Here all is real. Here glory's self is true
Through each regime to its own mission holy
Of plying still the world with something new
To cure its ache, or nobly souled or lowly.
One title Paris holds above the rest
Untouched by time or fortune's change or frown,
One temple of high fame, where she sits dressed
In youth eternal, and mirth's myrtle crown,
And where she writes, each night, with deathless hands,
" To all the glories—of the stage—of France."

XX

Enough, dear Paris ! We have laughed together,
'Tis time ~~that~~ we should part, lest tears should come.
I must fare on from winter and rough weather
And the dark tempests chained within Time's womb.
Southwards I go. Each footstep marks the tomb
Of a dead pleasure. Melun, Fontainebleau,—
How shall I name them with the ghosts that roam
In their deserted streets of long ago ?
I will not stop to weep. Before me lie
Lands larger in their purpose, and with dreams
Peopled more purely ; and to these I fly
For ever from life's idler stratagems.
France ! thy white hand I kiss in suppliant guise,
Too sad to love thee, and alas ! too wise.

XXI

To Switzerland, the land of lakes and snow,
And ancient freedom of ancestral type,
And modern innkeepers, who cringe and bow,
And venal echoes, and Pans paid to pipe !
See, I am come. And here in vineyards, ripe
With sweet white grapes, I will sit down and read
Once more the loves of Rousseau, till I wipe
My eyes in tenderness for names long dead.
This is the birthplace of all sentiment,
The fount of modern tears. These hills in me
Stir what still lives of fancy reverent
For Mother Nature. Here Time's minstrelsy
Awoke, some century since, one sunny morn,
To find Earth fortunate, and Man forlorn.

XXII

Unblest discovery of an age too real !
They needed not the beauty of the Earth,
Who held Heaven's hope for their supreme ideal,
And found in worlds unseen a better birth.
What to the eye of faith were the hills worth,
The voiceless forests, the unpeopled coasts,
The wildernesses void of sentient mirth ?
In death men praise thee not, Thou Lord of Hosts !
But when faith faltered, when the hope grew dim,
And Heaven was hid with phantoms of despair,
And Man stood trembling on destruction's brim,
Then turned he to the Earth, and found her fair ;
His home, his refuge, which no doubt could rob,
A beauty throbbing to his own heart's throb.

XXIII

Voltaire and Rousseau, these were thy twin priests,
Proud Mother Nature, on thy opening day.
The first with bitter gibes perplexed the feasts
Of thy high rival, and prepared the way ;
The other built thy shrine. 'Twas here, men say,
De Warens lived, whose pleasure was the text
Of the new gospel of the sons of clay,
The latest born of time, by faith unvexed.
Here for a century with reverent feet
Pilgrims, oppressed with barrenness of soul,
Toiled in their tears as to a Paraclete.
On these white hills they heard Earth's thunders roll
In sneers outpreaching the lost voice of God,
And shouted " Ichabod, ay, Ichabod ! "

XXIV

And here too I, the latest fool of Time,
Sad child of doubt and passionate desires,
Touched with all pity, yet in league with crime,
Watched the red sunsets from the Alpine spires,
And lit my poet's lamp with kindred fires,
And dared to snatch my share of the sublime.
There was one with me, master of the choirs
Of eloquent thought, who listening to my rhyme,
And seeing in me a soul set on things
Not wholly base, although my need was sore,
Bade me take courage and essay new wings.
And thus it was I first beheld this shore,
Mourning the loss yet half consoled of gain,
The passionate pleader of youth's creed of pain.

XXV

And what brave life it was we lived that tide,
Lived, or essayed to live—for who shall say
Youth garners aught but its own dreams denied,
Or handles what it hoped for yesterday ?
High prophets were we of the uncultured lay,
Supremely scorning all that to our pride
Seemed less than truth. Be truth the thing it may,
Our Goddess she, deformed but deified.
Prophets and poets of the Earth's last birth
Revealed in ugliness, a blind despair,
Only that we were young and of such worth
As still can thrive upon life's leanest fare,
And find in the world's turmoil its full quittance
Of joy denied, however poor the pittance.

XXVI

Youth is all valiant. He and I together,
Conscious of strength, and unreprieved of wrong,
Strained at the world's conventions as a tether
Too weak to bind us, and burst forth in song.
The backs of fools we scourged as with a thong,
And falsehood stripped to its last borrowed feather,
And vowed to fact what things to fact belong,
And of the rest asked neither why nor whether.
Gravely we triumphed in that Gorgon time,
Unsexed for us at length thro' lack of faith,
Our barren mistress, from whose womb sublime
No beauty more should spring, but only death.
Like birds we sang by some volcanic brink,
Leaning on ugliness, and did not shrink.

XXVII

The poets, every one, have sung of passion.
But which has sung of friendship, man with man ?
Love seeks its price, but friendship has a fashion
Larger to give, and of less selfish plan.
The world grows old. From Beersheba to Dan
We find all barren, ruby lips grown ashen,
Hearts hard with years—and only Jonathar.
Weeping with David o'er a ruined nation.
Then in the depth of days and our despair,
We count our treasures, if so be remain
Some loving letters, rings and locks of hair.
Nay, mourn not love. : These only are not vain,
Your manlier wounds, when in the front you stood,
For a friend's sake and your sworn Brotherhood.

XXVIII

Yet it is pitiful how friendships die,
Spite of our oaths eternal and high vows.
Some fall through blight of tongues wagged secretly,
Some through strifes loud in empty honour's house.
Some vanish with fame got too glorious,
And rapt to heaven in fiery chariots fly ;
And some are drowned in sloth and the carouse
Of wedded joys and long love's tyranny.
O ye, who with high-hearted valliance
Deem truth eternal and youth's dreams divine,
Keep ye from love and fame and the mischance
Of other worship than the Muses nine.
So haply shall you tread life's latest strand
With a true brother still, and hand in hand.

XXIX

How strangely now I come, a man of sorrow,
Nor yet such sorrow as youth dreamed of, blind,
But life's last indigence which dares not borrow
One garment more of Hope to cheat life's wind.
The mountains which we loved have grown unkind,
Nay, voiceless rather. Neither sound nor speech
Is heard among them, nor the thought enshrined
Of any deity man's tears may reach.
If I should speak, what echo would there come,
Of laughter lost, and dead unanswered prayers ?
The shadow of each valley is a tomb
Filled with the dust of manifold despairs.
" Here we once lived " : This motto on the door
Of silence stands, shut fast for evermore.

XXX

'Tis time I stepped from Horeb to the plain.
 Mountains, farewell. I need a heavier air.
 Youth's memories are not good for souls in pain,
 And each new age has its own meed of care.
 Farewell, sad Alps, you are my barrier
 Now to the North, and hold my passions slain
 For all life's vultures, as I downward fare
 To a new land of love which is not vain.
 How staid is Italy ! No gardened rose
 Scattering its leaves is chaster than she is.
 No cloister stiller, no retreat more close.
 There is a tameness even in her seas
 On which white towns look down, as who should say,
 " Here wise men long have lived, and live to-day."

XXXI

Yes, Italy is wise, a cultured prude,
 Stored with all maxims of a statelier age ;
 These are her lessons for our northern blood,
 With its dark Saxon madness and Norse rage.
 With these she tempers us and renders sage,
 As long ago she stayed the barbarous flood
 Surging against her, and her heritage
 Snatched from the feet of that brute multitude.
 Calmly she waits us. What to her shall be
 Our fevers of to-day, who erewhile knew
 Cæsar's ambitions ? What our pruriency,
 Who saw Rome sacked by the lewd Vandal crew ?
 What our despair, who, while a world stood mute,
 Saw Henry kneel in tears at Peter's-foot ?

XXXII

To-day I was at Milan, in such thought
As pilgrims bring who at faith's threshold stand,
Still burdened with the sorrows they have brought,
And vexed with stranger tongues in a strange land.
And lo, this sign was given me. At my hand
Hung that mysterious supper Vinci wrought
With the sad twelve who were Christ's chosen band,
A type of vows and courage come to nought.
And, while I gazed, with a reproachful look
The bread was broken and the wine was poured,
And the disciples raised their hands and spoke,
Each asking "Is it I? and I too? Lord!"
And there was answered them this mournful cry:
"All shall abandon me to-night." So I.

XXXIII

So I, I am ashamed of my old life,
Here in this saintly presence of days gone,
Ashamed of my weak heart's unmeaning strife,
Its loves, its lusts, its battles lost and won,
And its long search of pleasure 'neath the sun,
And its scant courage to endure the knife,
And its vain longing for good deeds undone,
Ending in bitter words with railing rife.
I am unworthy, yet am comforted,
As one who driving o'er long trackless roads
Of brake and rock and briar with footsore steed
And springless chariot, searching for vain gods,
Finds the high-road before him, where at ease
The old world plods the rut of centuries.

XXXIV

O fool ! O false ! I have abandoned Heaven,
And sold my wealth for metal of base kind.
O frail disciple of a fair creed given
For human hope when all the world was blind !
What was my profit ? Freedom of the mind,
A little pleasure of the years, some scars,
Of lusty youth, and some few thoughts enshrined
In worthier record of my manhood's years.
All else is loss, and unredeemed distress ;
The voiceful seasons uninvited come,
And bring their tribute of new flowers, and pass :
Only the reason of the world is dumb ;
Nor does God any more by word or sign
Speak to our rebel hearts of things divine.

XXXV

At last I kneel in Rome, the bourne, the goal
Of what a multitude of laden hearts !
No pilgrim of them all a wearier soul
Brought ever here, no master of dark arts
A spirit vexed with more discordant parts,
No beggar a scrip barer of all dole ;
No son, alas, steps sorer with the darts
Of that rebellious sorrow, his sin's toll.
I kneel and make an offering of my care
And folly, and hurt reason. Who would not
In this fair city be the fool of prayer ?
Who would not kneel, if only for the lot
Of being born again—a soul forgiven,
Clothed in new childhood and the light of Heaven ?

XXXVI

The majesty of Rome to me is nought ;
The imperial story of her conquering car
Touches me only with compassionate thought
For the doomed nations faded by her star.
Her palaces of Cæsars tombstones are
For a whole world of freedoms vainly caught
In her high fortune. Throned was she in war ;
By war she perished. So is justice wrought.
A nobler Rome is here, which shall not die.
She rose from the dead ashes of men's lust,
And robed herself anew in chastity,
And half redeemed man's heritage of dust.
This Rome I fain would love, though darkly hid
In mists of passion and desires scarce dead.

XXXVII

I will release my soul of argument.
He that would love must follow with shut eyes.
My reason of the years was discontent,
My treasure for all hope a vain surmise.
I will have done with wisdom's sophistries,
Her insolence of wit. What man shall say
He comfort takes in the short hour that dies,
Because he knew it mortal yesterday ?
The tree of knowledge bears a bitter fruit.
This is that other tree, whose branches hold
Fair store of faith, peace, pity absolute,
And deeds of virtue for a world grown cold.
If by its fruits the tree of life be known,
Here is a truth undreamed of Solomon.

XXXVIII

I saw one sitting on a kingly throne,
A man of age, whom Time had touched with white ;
White were his brows, and white his vestment shone,
And white the childhood of his lips with light,
Only his eyes gleamed masterful and bright,
Holding the secrets shut of worlds unknown,
And in his hand the sceptre lay of might,
To bind and loose all souls beneath the sun.
Where is the manhood, where the Godhood here ?
The weak things of the world confound the wise.
Here is all weakness, let us cast out fear.
Here is all strength. Ah, screen me from those eyes,
The terrible eyes of Him who sees unseen
The thing that is, and shall be, and has been.

XXXIX

Ancient of days ! What word is thy command
To one befooled of wit and his own way ?
What counsel hast thou, and what chastening hand
For a lost soul grown old in its dismay ?
What penance shall he do, what ransom pay,
Of blood poured out for faith in a far land,
What mute knee-service, weeping here to-day ;
In words of prayer no ear shall understand ?
Let him thy servant be, the least of all
In the Lord's Courts, but near thy mysteries,
To touch the crumbs which from thy table fall,
Let him——. But lo, thou speakest : " Not with these
Is God delighted. Get thee homeward hence.
They need thee more who wait deliverance ! "

XL

Here therefore ends my sad soul's pilgrimage,

In tears for sin and half-redeemed desire.

She was unworthy her high martyr's rage,

Or to be wholly purified by fire.

O Rome, thy ways are narrow and aspire
Too straitly for the knees of this halt age,

And, with the multitude, her forces tire,
Even while she holds thee fast, her heritage.
Path of sublime perfection upon Earth !

Your's is it in the clamour of vain days
To guard the calm eternal of Man's birth

And like an eagle to renew his days.
Give me your blessing, angels, ere I go,
Angels that guard the bridge of Angelo.

IN VINCULIS
SONNETS WRITTEN IN AN IRISH PRISON
1888

IN VINCULIS

CONDEMNED

FROM Caiphas to Pilate I was sent,
Who judged with unwashed hands a crime to me.

Next came the sentence, and the soldiery
Claimed me their prey. Without, the people rent
With weeping voices the loud firmament.

And through the night from town to town passed we
Mid shouts and drums and stones hurled heavily
By angry crowds on love and murder bent.

And last the gaol.—What stillness in these doors !

The silent turnkeys their last bolts have shot,
And their steps die in the long corridors.

I am alone. My tears run fast and hot.
Dear Lord, for Thy grief's sake I kiss these floors
Kneeling ; then turn to sleep, dreams trouble not.

AT THE GATE

Naked I came into the world of pleasure,
And naked come I to this house of pain.
Here at the gate I lay down my life's treasure,
My pride, my garments and my name with men.
The world and I henceforth shall be as twain,
No sound of me shall pierce for good or ill
These walls of grief. Nor shall I hear the vain
Laughter and tears of those who love me still.

Within, what new life waits me ! Little ease,
Cold lying, hunger, nights of wakefulness,
Harsh orders given, no voice to soothe or please,
Poor thieves for friends, for books rules meaningless ;
This is the grave—nay, Hell. Yet, Lord of Might,
Still in Thy light my spirit shall see light.

HONOUR DISHONOURED

Honoured I lived e'erwhile with honoured men
In opulent state. My table nightly spread
Found guests of worth, peer, priest and citizen,
And poet crowned, and beauty garlanded.
Nor these alone, for hunger too I fed,
And many a lean tramp and sad Magdalen
Passed from my doors less hard for sake of bread.
Whom grudged I ever purse or hand or pen'?

To-night, unwelcomed at these gates of woe
I stand with churls, and there is none to greet
My weariness with smile or courtly show
Nor, though I hunget long, to bring me meat.
God ! what a little accident of gold
Fences our weakness from the wolves of old !

HOW SHALL I BUILD

How shall I build my temple to the Lord,
Unworthy I, who am thus foul of heart ?
How shall I worship who no traitor word
Know but of love to play a suppliant's part ?
How shall I pray, whose soul is as a mart,
For thoughts unclean, whose tongue is as a sword
Even for those it loves to wound and smart ?
Behold how little I can help Thee, Lord.

The Temple I would build should be all white,
Each stone the record of a blameless day ;
The souls that entered there should walk in light,
Clothed in high chastity and wisely gay.
Lord, here is darkness. Yet this heart unwise,
Bruised in Thy service, take in sacrifice.

A CONVENT WITHOUT GOD

A prison is a convent without God.
Poverty, Chastity, Obedience
Its precepts are. In this austere abode
None gather wealth of pleasure or of pence.
Woman's light wit, the heart's concupiscence
Are banished here. At the least warder's nod
Thy neck shall bend in mute subservience.
Nor yet for virtue—rather for the rod.

Here a base turnkey novice-master is,
Teaching humility. The matin bell
Calls thee to toil, but little comforteth.
None heed thy prayers or give the kiss of peace.
Nathless, my soul, be valiant. Even in Hell
Wisdom shall preach to thee of life and death.

THE TWO VOICES

There are two voices with me in the night,
Easing my grief. The God of Israel saith,
"I am the Lord thy God which vanquisheth.
See that thou walk unswerving in my sight,
So shall thy enemies thy footstool be.
I will avenge." Then wake I suddenly,
And, as a man new armoured for the fight,
I shout aloud against my enemy.

Anon, another speaks, a voice of care
With sorrow laden and akin to grief,
"My son," it saith, "What is my will with thee?
The burden of my sorrows thou shalt share.
With thieves thou too shalt be accounted thief,
And in my kingdom thou shalt sup with me."

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LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY

Long have I searched the Earth for liberty
In desert places and lands far abroad
Where neither Kings nor constables should be,
Nor any law of Man, alas, or God.
Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood,
These were my quarries which eternally
Fled from my footsteps fast as I pursued,
Sad phantoms of desire by land and sea.

See, it is ended. Sick and overborne
By foes and fools, and my long chase, I lie.
Here, in these walls, with all life's souls forlorn
Herded I wait,—and in my ears the cry,
"Alas, poor brothers, equal in Man's scorn
And free in God's good liberty to die."

A LESSON IN HUMILITY

'Tis time, my soul, thou shouldst be purged of pride.

What men are these with thee, whose ill deeds done
Make thee thus shrink from them and be denied ?

They are but as thou art, each mother's son

A convict in transgression. Here is one,
Sayest thou, who struck his fellow and he died.

And yet he weeps hot tears. Do thy tears run ?
This other thieved, yet clasps Christ crucified.

Where is thy greater virtue ? Thinkest thou sin

Is but crime's record on the judgment seat ?

Or must thou wait for death to be bowed down ?

Oh for a righteous reading which should join

Thy deeds together in an accusing sheet,
And leave thee if thou couldst, to face men's frown !

THE COURT OF PENANCE

Behold the Court of Penance. Four gaunt walls

Shutting out all things but the upper heaven.

Stone flags for floor, where daily from their stalls

The human cattle in a circle driven

Tread down their pathway to a mire uneven,
Pale-faced, sad-eyed, and mute as funerals.

Woe to the wretch whose weakness unforgiven
Falters a moment in the track or falls !

Yet is there consolation. Overhead

The pigeons build and the loud jackdaws talk,
And once in the wind's eye, like a ship moored,
A sea-gull flew and I was comforted.

Even here the heavens declare thy glory, Lord,
And the free firmament thy handiwork.

MITIGATIONS

My prison has its pleasures. Every day
At breakfast-time, spare meal of milk and bread,
Sparrows come trooping in familiar way
With head aside beseeching to be fed.
A spider too for me has spun her thread
Across the prison rules, and a brave mouse
Watches in sympathy the warders' tread,
These two my fellow-prisoners in the house.

But about dusk in the rooms opposite
I see lamps lighted, and upon the blind
A shadow passes all the evening through.
It is the gaoler's daughter fair and kind
And full of pity (so I image it)
Till the stars rise, and night begins anew.

GOD IS MY WITNESS

God knows, 'twas not with a fore-reasoned plan
I left the easeful dwellings of my peace,
And sought this combat with ungodly Man,
And ceaseless still through years that do not cease
Have warred with Powers and Principalities.
My natural soul, e'er yet these strifes began,
Was as a sister diligent to please
And loving all, and most the human clan.

God knows it. And he knows how the world's tear
Touched me. And He is witness of my wrath,
How it was kindled against murderers
Who slew for gold, and how upon their path
I met them. Since which day the World in arms
Strikes at my life with angers and alarms.

THE DEEDS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

There are wrongs done in the fair face of heaven
Which cry aloud for vengeance, and shall cry ;
Loves beautiful in strength whose wit has striven
Vainly with loss and man's inconstancy ;
Dead children's faces watched by souls that die ;
Pure streams defiled ; fair forests idly riven ;
A nation suppliant in its agony
Calling on justice, and no help is given.

All these are pitiful. Yet, after tears,
Come rest and sleep and calm forgetfulness,
And God's good providence consoles the years.
Only the coward heart which did not guess,
The dreamer of brave deeds that might have been,
Shall cureless ache with wounds for ever green.

A DREAM OF GOOD

To do some little good before I die ;
To wake some echoes to a loftier theme ;
To spend my life's last store of industry
On thoughts less vain than Youth's discordant dream ;
To endow the world's grief with some counter-scheme
Of logical hope which through all time should lighten
The burden of men's sorrow and redeem
Their faces' paleness from the tears that whiten ;

To take my place in the world's brotherhood
As one prepared to suffer all its fate ;
To do and be undone for sake of good,
And conquer rage by giving love for hate ;
That were a noble dream, and so to cease,
Scorned by the proud but with the poor at peace.

HER NAME LIBERTY

I thought to do a deed of chivalry,
An act of worth, which haply in her sight
Who was my mistress should recorded be
And of the nations. And, when thus the fight
Faltered and men once bold with faces white
Turned this and that way in excuse to flee,
I only stood, and by the foeman's might
Was overborne and mangled cruelly.

Then crawled I to her feet, in whose dear cause
I made this venture, and "Behold," I said,
"How I am wounded for thee in these wars."
But she, "Poor cripple, wouldst thou I should wed
A limbless trunk?" and laughing turned from me.
Yet was she fair, and her name "Liberty."

FAREWELL DARK GAOL

Farewell, dark gaol. You hold some better hearts
Than in this savage world I thought to find.
I do not love you nor the fraudulent arts
By which men tutor men to ways unkind.
Your law is not my law, and yet my mind
Remains your debtor. It has learned to see
How dark a thing the earth would be and blind
But for the light of human charity.

I am your debtor thus and for the pang
Which touched and chastened, and the nights of thought
Which were my years of learning. See I hang
Your image here, a glory all unsought,
About my neck. Thus saints in symbol hold
Their tools of death and darings manifold.

I WILL SMILE NO MORE

No, I will smile no more. If but for pride
And the high record of these days of pain,
I will not be as these, the uncrucified
Who idly live and find life's pleasures vain.
The garment of my life is rent in twain,
Parted by love and pity. Some have died
Of a less hurt than 'twas my luck to gain,
And live with God, nor dare I be denied.

No, I will smile no more. Love's touch of pleasure
Shall be as tears to me, fair words as gall,
The sun as blackness, friends as a false measure,
And Spring's blithe pageant on this earthly ball,
If it should brag, shall earn from me no praise
But silence only to my end of days.

LATER SONNETS

LATER SONNETS

LOVE IS BEST

DARE all things for Love's sake, since love is best,
Of Fate ask nothing, rather by your deeds
Rebuke it for its niggard ways unblest,
And trust to Love to shield you in your needs.
Remember in the shade of the new years
Only what Love has given. This shall be
Daily your dole, a safeguard from your tears,
Outwitting change and Time's inconstancy.
—Knock loudly at Love's door. He is awake.
Offer him roses. 'Tis his month of June.
Watch all his ways. Do worship for his sake.
Seek out his service. He shall serve you soon.
Know this of Love, who fears not Fate's disaster
Answers for both and is of Time the master.

SHE SHALL NOT GUESS

EVEN if I died no sound should tell it her.
Death babbles, but the calm of her dear eyes
In vain would ask, no tell-tale breath should stir
The lips still treasuring a thought unwise.
How vain my life has been in its disguise,
Left unregarded, her least pensioner,
Yielding to all, unasking even with sighs
The dole of hope not Heaven could quite confer.
—To-day behold me on this page her name
Over my own inscribing, with no prayer,
Nor daring even to kneel in my distress.
What I have written in this candle's flame
Shrinks ere 'tis finished, and the incensed air
Bears but betrays it not. She shall not guess.

ALL WHITE

ALL white, all light, all beautiful she stands,
Love in her eyes, a glory round her brows,
Blanched as the lilies chaste in her chaste hands.
Even so God's saints in their celestial house.
Red only are her lips, ay, red as those
Turned by the Queen, that happy day in France,
As yet unknissed, to him who made his vows,
Victor in fight, to her his soul's romance.
Idly she stands in dreams.—Ah, Launcelot,
Couldst thou but plead here haply and prevail,
Touch her soft cheek, draw tears from her sweet eyes,
Open her lips to passionate words unwise,
Receive her true kiss 'neath thy coat of mail :
In Love's name, I who love, should grudge it not.

ALL WHITE CONTINUED

Ah, beautiful sweet woman, made in vain,
Since Launcelot is dead and only I,
Alas for this new world of recreant men,
Remain in age Love's creed to justify
And prove his right to fools who would deny !
Heaven's help shall win her, though she long hath been
Child of a doubting Age. Or let me die
At her dear feet, my Guenevere, my queen.
—Ride therefore forth, my soul, on this last quest.
Oblivion soon shall fold all in its arms.
Love, if she love thee or love not. The loss
Is hers, not thine, since each thing else is dross ;
Not thine, whom Heaven makes whole and no hurt harms,
Even that of death, so thou have loved thy best.

GRATITUDE

If gratitude a poor man's virtue is,
'Tis one at least my sick soul can afford.
Bankrupt I am of all youth's charities,
But not of thanks. No. Thanks be to the Lord !
Praise be, dear Lady of all grace, to you.
You were my mediciner, my one sole friend,
When the world spurned me from its retinue.
And I am yours, your bond-slave to the end.
—How shall I tell it you ? There was a time
When I was sordid in my unbelief,
And mocked at all things less robust than crime,
A convict in my prison-house of grief.
But that is past. Your pity was the key
Which sent me forth, a broken man, but free.

O FOR A SOUL

O FOR a soul surrendered of all guile !
A plain white soul with nothing on it writ,
No creed of mockery to make men smile,
No boast of wisdom travestied as wit ;
Only a clean soul where the infinite
Calm of the heavens, as on some tropic isle,
Should have looked down and on the face of it,
Inscribed in sunlight, " Nothing here was vile."
—Thus to my life I argue it to-day,
Thus chide my heart its too long vanity,
Its lawless strength, its insolence of play,
Its ancient rage of storm-tossed chivalry.
And yet, God wot, should Love's wind breathe my way,
My heart would rise still, a tumultuous Sea.

TO ONE IN A GARDEN

If I were other than, alas, I am,
A soul in strife, whom banded foemen vex,
If toil were folly and good deeds a sham,
And hydra wrong had shed its serpent necks,
And life's dark problems could no more perplex,
How sweet it were, forgotten of all blame,
In that far garden which your summer decks
To dream with you that grief was but a name.
—Ay, dream ! For waking which of us were wise
To spell grief's epitaph ? Some tears must be
Even in the herald hour of your sunrise.
And in the night ? Ah, child, what misery,
Think you, awaits us when life's flood-gates strain
To the full deluge of the descending rain ?

TO ONE IN A HOSTILE CAMP

How dare I, Juliet, in love's kindness be
Your counsellor for these mad days of war,
I, a sworn *Montagu*, to liberty
Bound by all oaths which men least lightly swear ?
How shall I aid you, who enlisted are
In a strange camp, 'neath a strange captaincy,
Nor urge rebellion to that lurid star
Which mocks the captive nations held in fee ?
—Nay, bid me not thus falsify my griefs.
I cannot turn my creed nor change my King.
Around me crumble my life's last beliefs,
But in the wreck of faiths to faith I cling.
Lo, this my message is, till Time shall die,
“ Though all abandon these, yet never I.”

A RELAPSE

I THOUGHT that I had done with fleshly things,
That in the azure of high thought my soul
Had learned to fly on less substantial wings
To a new Heaven, a sublimer goal.
I thought that I was wise beneath the cowl
Of my dead hopes, beyond all power of Spring's
Most eloquent music to again cajole,
And that my service was the King of Kings.
—But look, alas, how thoughtless thought can be,
For to me thinking thus one ventured in
Bearing a letter and I read your name.
Then in an instant through my limbs a flame
Of pleasure ran, and wrought such change in me
That I was eager for all loveliest sin.

AN AUTUMN SONNET

THESE little presents of your tenderness,
Although less grand a gift than was your love,
Are dear to me in this October stress
Of wind and war and whirling leaves above.
They comfort my soul's Autumn, and they prove
How little time can do, to ban or bless,
How much ourselves. You willed the years should move
Back in their cycle. And behold, love, this !
—Now, therefore, let us mark this fortunate day,
And use it for our feast day. Every year
Let us, when winds are high and the leaves fall,
Hold in this house our love's memorial,
Sitting thus hand in hand. Still let me lay
As in the happy days, ere leaves were sere,
My head upon your lap and call you "dear."

FRIENDS

I FELL among the thieves awhile ago,
Who beat and stripped me ; and, thus used, I fled
For comfort to the arms of one I know
Who is to me a sister, being wed
To my heart's kinsman. But "Alas," she said,
"Your nakedness will bring our house to woe.
Prithee begone." She blushed and turned her head,
And left me doubting with which foot to go.
Friends in the street beheld me, old and new.
The new friends nodded ; but the older stepped
In haste from my reproachful eyes and me.
They feared a creditor for sympathy,
And so they fled. One only of the crew,
A harlot, stopped me, kissed my wounds and wept.

THE PRE-ADAMITE WORLD

Who shall declare the glory of the World,
The natural World before Man's form was seen ?
Fair stainless planet through the heavens hurled,
And clothed in garments of immortal green !
What depths of forest girt her ! What serene
Pastures were hers for cattle numberless
Owning no lord save her, their guileless queen,
Dear Nature's self who ruled them but to bless !
If there was war in Heaven, peace reigned on Earth.
Not by disease did the world's life grow tame,
But by the hand of God, in drought or dearth
Or sudden palsy when the lion came.
Death ! who should fear him or his mercy sue,
Whose last pang was the first each creature knew ?

A VISION OF FOLLY

I saw one rushing madly in pursuit
Of Liberty. With frenzied steps he strode.
Old laws and customs with disdainful foot
He spurned beneath him in a mire of blood.
He stood before the wondering world a god,
A king with Freedom for his spouse and queen.
He felt his empire was divine and trod,
As on a footstool, on the necks of men.
Ruin awhile and havoc strewed his path.
He had his day of glory and his fall.
He stood once more upon his father's hearth,
Sated with pride, and there in frenzy worse
Wrought foul dishonour on that honoured hall,
And left its walls forever with a curse.

AMBITION

I HAD ambition once. Like Solomon
I asked for wisdom, deeming wisdom fair,
And with much pains a little knowledge won
Of Nature's cruelty and Man's despair,
And mostly learned how vain such learnings were.
Then in my grief I turned to happiness,
And woman's love awhile was all my care,
And I achieved some sorrow and some bliss,
Till love rebelled. Then the mad lust of power
Became my dream, to rule my fellow-men ;
And I too lorded it my little hour,
And wrought for weal or woe with sword and pen,
And wounded many, some, alas, my friends.
Now I ask silence. My ambition ends.

AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

HERE our roads part. Go thou by thy green valley,
Thy youth before thee and the river Nile.
My path lies o'er the desert, and my galley
Has rougher seas to plough (and days) the while.
I know not what to offer you : a smile,
A blessing, a farewell ? I dare not dally
Even with the thought of tears. 'Twas but a mile
We walked together, and such things were folly.
I will not hope, who have no faith in fate, "
That I shall you remember or you me
Beyond to-morrow. Yet, perhaps the wind
Blowing some morning through its Eastern gate
May tell you of my fortune ; and behind
The Western star some evening I may see,
As in a vision of far days more kind,
Your dear eyes watching while the night grows blind.

TO ONE WHO HAD LEFT HER CONVENT
TO MARRY

A YEAR ago you gave yourself to God.
It was a noble gift and nobly given ;
And we, who watched you as you fearless trod,
Like one inspired, your pilgrimage to Heaven,
Rejoiced, poor sinners, there was still this leaven,
For a bad world, this bud on Aaron's rod,
This virgin still at watch with the wise seven,
And, envying you, we almost envied God.
—A year ago ! Another service now
Moves your delight, another noble whim,
Another bridegroom and another vow.
Again we envy you and envy him.
First God's, then Man's ! Your love all ranks would level.
Who knows ? Next year may add a third, the Devil.

TO ONE WITH A SPRING NOSEGAY

SEE, Silvia, here I send you these Spring flowers,
Though Summer's come already and full June.
The year is late, like this new love of ours,
And all the sweeter that it came less soon.
In the oak-woods I gathered them at noon,
And heard the thrushes sing without a stop.
The sturdy cuckoo had not changed his tune,
But told his old wild loves still full of hope.
Here bluebells you will find and margarets,
And clovers pink and periwinkles blue,
And royal broom of lost Plantagenets,
And lilac sprays, your own, and all for you.
Yes, all for you, and with them this poor song,
From a true heart their greenest leaves among.

TO ONE ON HER BIRTHDAY

How shall I choose to wish you happiness
On this day or another? Your life's way
Has passed already far beyond our guess,
Who only watch and wait for you and pray.
Our love is but the creature of man's clay,
And you have chosen grief for your soul's bliss.
How shall I offer you mere joy to-day,
Nor seem for greater wealth to bring you less?
You have a world to win by faith sublime.
You have a heart to break for human woe.
That which you seek was never seen in Time.
That you shall find I dare not seek to know.
Yet will I wish you this, for your new birth,
You still may love : the sweetest thing on Earth.

TO THE SAME ON HER BIRTHDAY

DEAR, if my secret wishes could have wings
And you had need of aught for happiness,
How would I fly to gather costly things
In lands afar and blue seas fathomless!
What buried gems; what long-drowned argosies;
What secrets shut in passionate lute-strings;
What dust of martyrs agonised in bliss;
What broken sceptres in the hands of Kings!
How would I fashion these for your delight
In tales of grief and love for ever young,
Till you too dreamed: But that my sluggard wit
Falters and time is heavy on my tongue,
And that you scorn all dreams but the sole right
Of your soul's truth triumphant over wrong.

LOST THREADS

HERE lie the lost threads of a tangled life,
Enigmas meaningless and without clue,
Loose ends and knots, frayed edges of time's strife,
Essays in vain love ignorant of you.
Not so had my life been had Heaven's high blue
Apparelled us betimes in its romance,
Clothed us with one fair passion chaste and true,
Armed my weak soul with your dear countenance.
—Rage of my heart! How idly I declaim,
Now knowing your delights and sweetnesses,
Empty sad verse engarlanding your name.
Great griefs are silent as the wide lone seas;
Irrevocable loss lives bare of fame.
Else were I eloquent of thee and these.

THE MORTE D'ARTHUR

THESE are the tales in all their valorous lore
Of that famed frolic of the Table Round
No shame-faced verse, but stout prose to the core,
As Malory wrote it and our fathers found.
Tales touching still, and still through time renowned,
But less, methinks, for their high deeds that bore
Their crests so proudly than the one lost sound
Of Lancelot's step at the Queen's chamber door.
—How their sighs echo! Think, if then she had made
Another answer than her human "Yes,"
And been more valiant and denied and slept!
Should we still weep o'er Bors and Galahad,
The Sangreal's quest, Gawayne in wrath equipped,
Or all King Arthur's jousts in Lyonesse?

THE COMING OF LOVE

You ask me how this wonder came about.
 'Twas thus it happened : I, that day, alone
 Still weak and wrapped in white and without thought,
 Had wandered forth towards the dial stone.
 No voice had told me to prepare a throne
 For my King's coming ; neither had I wrought
 New robes for him, nor woven any crown,
 Nor any speech my stammering lips had taught.
 He came unheralded. His dark eyes were
 His only messengers for my delight.
 These told me of his presence and his will,
 And bade me fear not I was less than fair,
 But that I ever more thus clothed in white
 His grace should find. And so I serve him still.

HER SECRET IS BETRAYED

ONCE on a happy time you said to me
 " Give me your soul, O give me, dear, your soul " ;
 And I, who thought not of that other toll,
 Gave with it too my body utterly.
 This rhymèd love you left me, my sole fee,
 Which I must treasure ; and the dear-bought scroll,
 Now that your pleasure had become my dole,
 I laid away with all my life to be.
 —To-day you take it from me, my poor rhyme,
 And lightly ask me, " Why these foolish tears ? " ²
 You give the world my secret—" it was time."
 What can it matter after all these years ? "
 Ay. What in truth ? Yet herein lies the smart,
 That grief for you no longer grieves my heart.

A WOMAN'S SONNETS

I

If the past year were offered me again,
With choice of good and ill before me set.
Should I be wiser for the bliss and pain
And dare to choose that we had never met ?
Could I find heart those happy hours to miss,
When love began unthought of and unspoke
That first strange day when by a sudden kiss
We knew each other's secret and awoke ?
Ah, no ! not even to escape the smart
Of that fell agony I underwent,
Flying from thee and my own traitor heart,
Till doubts and dreads and battlings overspent,
I knew at last that thou or love or fate
Had conquered and repentance was too late.

II

THE SAME CONTINUED

Nay, dear one, ask me not to leave thee yet.
Let me a little longer hold thy hand.
Too soon it is to bid me to forget
The joys I was so late to understand.
The future holds but a blank face for me,
The past is all confused with tears and grey,
But the sweet present, while thy smiles I see,
Is perfect sunlight, an unclouded day.
Speak not of parting, not at least this hour,
Though well I know Love cannot Time outlast.
Let me grow wiser first and gain more power,
More strength of will to deal with my dead past.
Love me in silence still, one short hour's space :
'Tis all I ask of thee, this little grace.

III

THE SAME CONTINUED

Where is the pride for which I once was blamed,
My vanity which held its head so high ?
Who would believe them, seeing me thus tamed,
Thus subject, here as at thy feet I lie,
Pleading for love which now is all my life,
Craving a word for memory's rage to keep,
Asking a sign to still my inward strife,
Petitioning a touch to soothe my sleep ?
Who would now guess them, as I kiss the ground
On which the feet of him I love have trod,
And bow before his voice whose least sweet sound
Speaks louder to me than the voice of God ;
And knowing all the while that one dark day,
Spite of my worship, thou wilt turn away ?

IV

THE SAME CONTINUED

Should ever the day come when this drear world
Shall read the secret which so close I hold,
Should taunts and jeers at my bowed head be hurled,
And all my love and all my shame be told,
I could not, as some doughtier women do,
Fling jests and gold and live the scandal down,
Nor, knowing all fame's bruitings to be true,
Keep a proud face and brave the talk of town.
I have no courage for such tricks and ways,
No wish to flaunt a once well-honoured name.
I have too dear a thought of earlier days,
Too deep a dread of my deserved shame.
So, when it comes, with one last suppliant cry
For pardon from my wronged ones, I must die.

V

THE SAME CONTINUED

Whate'er the cost to me, with this farewell,
I shall not see thee, speak to thee again.
If some on Earth must feel the pangs of Hell,
Mine only be it who have earned my pain.
No matter if my life be blank and dead,
Bankrupt of pleasure : it is better so
Than risk dishonour on a once loved head,
Than link all loved ones with my own sole woe.
I have no claim to bring grief's shade on these,
To mix their pure life's waters with my wine,
To vex the dead, dear dead, in their new peace
With knowledge of my sin and great decline.
~~For~~ these I leave thee, and, though life be rent
With the rude fight, think not I shall relent.

VI

THE SAME CONTINUED

What have I lost ? The faith I had that Right
Must surely prove itself than Ill more strong.
For see how little my poor prayers had might
To save me, at the trial's pinch, from wrong.
What have I lost ? The truth of my proud eyes
Scorning deceit. Behold me here to-day
Leading a double life, at shifts with lies,
And trembling lest each shadow should betray.
No longer with my lost ones may I mourn,
Who came to me in sleep and breathed soft words.
Sleepless I lie and fearful and forlorn,
With their love's edge still wounding like a sword's
In thy dear presence only I find rest.
To thee alone naught needs to be confessed.

VII

THE SAME CONTINUED

What have I gained ? A little charity ?
I never more may dare to fling a stone
At any weakness, nor make boast that I
A better fence or fortitude had shown ;
Some learning ? I in love's lore have grown wise,
Plucked apples of the evil and the good,
Made one short trespass into Paradise
And known the full taste of forbidden food.
But love, if it be gold, has much alloy,
And I would gladly buy back ignorance,
But for the thought which still is my heart's joy
That once your life grew happier in my hands,
That in your darkest and most troubled hour
I had, like Jesse's son, a soothing power.

VIII

THE SAME CONTINUED

I sue thee not for pity on my case.
If I have sinned, the judgment has begun.
My joy was but one day of all the days,
And clouds have blotted it and hid the sun.
Thou wert so much to me ! But soon I knew
How small a part could mine be in thy life,
That all a woman may endure or do
Counts little to her hero in the strife.
I do not blame thee who deserved no blame ;
Thou hast so many worlds within thy ken.
I staked my all upon a losing game,
Knowing the nature and the needs of men,
And knowing too how quickly pride is spent.
With open eyes to Love and Death I went.

IX

THE SAME CONTINUED

The day draws nigh, methinks, when I could stay
Calm in thy presence with no dream of ill,
When, having put all earthliness away,
I could be near thee, touching thee, and still
Feel no mad throbbing at my foolish heart,
No sudden rising of unbidden tears,
Could mark thee come and go, to meet or part,
Without the gladness and without the fears.
Have patience with me then for this short space.
I shall be wise, but may not yet unmoved
See a strange woman put into my place
And happy in thy love, as I was loved :
This were too much. Ah, let me not yet see
The love-light in thine eyes, and not for me.

X

THE SAME CONTINUED

Love, ere I go, forgive me each least wrong,
Each trouble I unwittingly have wrought.
My heart, my life, my tears to thee belong ;
Yet have I erred, maybe, through too fond thought.
One sin, most certainly, I need to atone :
The sin of loving thee while yet unwooed.
Mine only was this wrong, this guilt alone.
The woman tempted thee from ways of good.
Forgive me too, ere thy dear pity cease,
That I denied thee, vexed thee with delay,
Sought my soul's coward shelter, not thy peace,
And having won thee still awhile said nay.
Forgive me this, that I too soon, too late,
Too wholly gave a love disconsolate.

XI

THE SAME CONTINUED

Wild words I write, and lettered in deep pain,
To lay in your loved hand as love's farewell.
It is the thought we shall not meet again
Nerves me to write and my whole secret tell.
For when I speak to you, you only jest,
And laughing break the sentence with a kiss,
Till my poor love is never quite confessed,
Nor know you half its tears and tenderness.
When the first darkness and the clouds began
I hid it from you fearing your reproof ;
I would not vex your life's high aim and plan
With my poor woman's woe, and held aloof.
But now that all is ended, pride and shame,
My tumults and my joys I may proclaim.

XII

THE SAME CONTINUED

'Tis ended truly, truly as was best.
Love is a little thing, for one short day ;
You could not make it your life's only quest,
Nor watch the poor corpse long in its decay.
Go forth, dear, thou hast much to do on earth ;
In life's campaign there waits thee a great part,
Much to be won and conquered of more worth
Than this poor victory of a woman's heart.
For me the daylight of my years is dim.
I seek not gladness, yet shall find content
In such small duties as are learned of Him
Who bore all sorrows, till my youth is spent.
Yet come what may to me of weal or woe,
I love thee, bless thee, dear, where'er thou go.

NIGHT ON OUR LIVES

NIGHT on our lives, ah me, how surely has it fallen !
 Be they who can deceived. I dare not look before.
 See, sad years, to your own ; your little wealth long
 hoarded,
 How sore it was to win, how soon it perished all !
 Beauty, the one face loved, the pure eyes mine so wor-
 shipped,
 So true, so touching once, so tender in their dreams !
 Find me that hour again. I yield the rest uncounted,
 Urns for the dust of time, divine in her sole tears.
 —Unseen one ! Unforgotten ! Oh, if your eyes behold it
 By chance, this page revealed which trembling hides your
 name,
 Merged in the ultimate wreck of fame and meaner joys !
 Co-partner be with me in this my soul's last sorrow,
 Pearl of my hidden life, this grief, that not again
 Unspoiled love's rose shall blow, the dear love which was ours.

HOW GREY THE WORLD WAS

How grey the world was with its memories,
 How dark even this gay room where the motes run !
 How black these curtains, thick with murder cries,
 These chairs, this floor with things slain in the sun !
 'Twas here I strangled love, a year ago,
 And hid it 'neath these pillows drenched in blood,
 As a mad mother her sweet babe of woe,
 Too strong to die, too fair, which shrieks aloud.
 How black and bare and bitter the world was
 Just yesterday ! To-day, this room, dear Heaven,
 What laughters fill it ! what light footsteps pass !
 See, the white chairs dance round me pleasure-driven,
 And these sad pillows, where I wept, blab out
 The news that you are here, in psalm and shout !

MOONSTRUCK

I HAVE quarrelled with the Moon. I loved her once,
 As all boys love one face supremely fair.
 I had heard her praised, and I too, happy dunce,
 Let my tongue wag and made her my heart's prayer.
 My prayer ! For what, great heaven ? The midnight air
 Seemed trembling in her presence, and those nuns
 The worshipping host knelt round her, star and star,
 And sobbed " magnificat " in antiphons.
 She was my saint, queen, goddess. Then, one night,
 Another face I saw, which, not a god's,
 Moved me to dreams more sweet than reverence,
 And we were near our bliss, when from the clouds
 Her angry eyes looked down and drove us thence
 Moonstruck and blind and robbed of our delight.

POUR QUI SAIT ATTENDRE

ALL things, they say, come home to those that wait,
 Riches, power, fame, lost fortune, hope deferred,
 Health to our friends, ill hap to those we hate,
 Even love, that glorious paradisa bird,
 The woman unattained, whose thought has stirred
 Desire to its last chord importunate ;
 All shall be ours (so runs the common word)
 If but our patience lag not on our fate.
 —O, indigent consoling, even if true !
 Crumbs for the hungry, who thus fasting live
 And die deceived in impotence of bliss !
 And we, the god-like fortune-favoured few,
 Full dowered of joy ? What ransom shall we give,
 In thanks to Heaven, who did not wait to kiss ?

YOUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

WHAT price, child, shall I pay for your bright eyes
(How large a debt !) the light they shed on me ?
What for your cheeks, so red in their surprise,
Your lips, your hands, your maiden gestures free,
Your fair brows crowned with grave nobility,
All the delight which in your presence lies,
The words unsaid, the deeds which dare not be,
The dreams undreamed, my meed of Paradise ?
—Nay, I can pay naught ; your poor bankrupt I,
Since gold may not nor frankincense nor myrrh
Serve my account nor any gift of kings.
Yet be my wealth yours, joys that fools deny,
Knowledge of life, love, power as presbyter,
The wit to teach youth's zeal to use its wings.

LE ROI EST MORT. VIVE LE ROI !

WHY wait for Arthur ? He too long has slept.
He shall not hear you—no, nor heed your moan,
More than the wail of those fair Queens that kept
Their watch for him what months in Avalon !
He shall not wake for any mother's son
Nor mother's daughter of them all in tears,
His knights, his ladies. How then for this one,
You the last blossom of our world's lost years ?
—Ah, let him sleep. For see how in the wood,
Under the dead oak, green new saplings spring,
How the thorn blossoms, while birds cry aloud
In scorn of grief. And, Lady, by the rood !
There rides a knight, new-armed and questing proud,
Who shouts, "The king is dead. Long live the King !"

LOVE RIDES DISGUISED

WHAT name is his, thy knight's? Nay, ask it not.
If fate should hear thee, child, what griefs might come.
Love rides disguised. He fears a counterplot
For his own plot of joy in heathendom.
Restrained he goes; a single rose-red plume
Is all his badge. No blazon hath he wrought,
Device nor sign; his motto "*sum qui sum.*"
Silent is he of Court and Camelot.
—Be wise, sweetheart, nor tempt time to mischance.
Love at his own hour shall his whole face show.
Oh, if thou hast not seen him, thou shalt see!
Undo shalt thou his helm with thy blest hands,
Nurse his tired head upon thy pitying knee.
Then shall he tell all, and thou all shalt know.

A GLORY GONE

WHAT is my thought of you, beloved one,
Now you have passed from me and gone your ways?
Glory is gone with you from stars and sun,
And all wise meaning from the nights and days.
There is no colour, no delight, no praise
In the deep forest, where your dear eyes shone,
Nor any dryad face with cheeks ablaze
To paint the glades grown sere as Avalon.
—What is my thought of you? No thought have I
But just to weep the pity of lost things,
Grieve with the wind, and rain tears with the rain.
The sun may smile, who knows, in a blue sky,
To-morrow? But to-day Hope's passionate wings
Are folded and Love waits on only Pain.

A DIGIT OF THE MOON

THIS book is written for Man's ultimate need,
A creed of joy sent down to the aged Earth
From days of happier daring and more mirth
To comfort and console all hearts that bleed.
Here shall ye find how Love, that mastering weed
Of tropic growth and paradisal power,
Sprang in a night and found its fortunate hour
And was fulfilled of glory, flower, fruit, seed,
A wonder to the Forest.—O ye souls
Of men and women, who on Time's whim wait
Nor clutch her hem when Pleasure turns to flee !
Read of these two, who ill content with doles
Rose in their rage and gave assault to Fate
And won their birth-fruit. Read. Nay, dare it ye !

NEW THINGS ARE BEST

WHAT shall I tell you, child, in this new Sonnet ?
Life's art is to forget, and last year's sowing
Cast in Time's furrow with the storm winds blowing
Bears me a wild crop with strange fancies on it.
Last year I wore your sole rose in my bonnet.
This year—who knows—who, even the All-knowing,
What to my vagrant heart, for its undoing,
Of weeds shall blossom ere my tears atone it ?
—New Spring is in the air with new desirings ;
New wonders fructify Earth, Sea, and Heaven,
And happy birds sing loud from a new nest.
Ah, why then grieve Love's recreant aspirings,
His last year's hopes, his vows forgot, forgiven ?
Child, be we comforted ! New things are best.

UNE FEUILLE MORTE

JE rêve debout devant la porte
Qui vient de se fermer sur moi.
Je colle mes yeux en triste sorte
Sur ce carré de sombre bois.
Je tourne entre mes deux doigts
Une fleur, une petite fleur ; qu'importe ?
Elle était bien bleue autrefois.
Ce n'est plus qu'une feuille morte.
Pauvre fleur, la douleur t'enlaidit
Les pétales mornes et pendues.
Tu sens mauvais, tu noircis.
Hélas fidèle, que fais-tu ?
Mourir ! C'est vite prendre ton parti !
Et moi donc, qui ai tant perdu ?

THREE PICTURES

I HAVE seen many things in many lands,
And many sorrows known and many joys,
And clutched at pleasure's cup with lawless hands,
And drunk my fill of mirth and lust and noise,
Nor spared to make of human hearts my toys,
But fed with life the brute strength of my pride,
As with a tribute of fair living boys
The monstrous lord of Crete him satisfied.
—But of all pictures laid up in my soul
Are three most beautiful and passionate, .
The illumined margin of an ancient scroll,
Which moraliseth pity, love and hate ;
And these, when she is sad, she doth unroll
And on their common meaning meditate.

THREE PICTURES CONTINUED

THE first, a woman, nobly limbed and fair,
Standeth at sunset by a famed far sea.
Red are her lips as Love's own kisses were,
Yet speak they never though they smile on me.
An old knight, next, and arméd cap-à-pie,
Watcheth the slaughtered clay that was his heir.
The winding-sheet is not more white than he,
Hath sat since dawn and hath not shed a tear.
The third a tortured bull about to die
In the arena. No proud infidel
E'er laid his dripping spears more scornfully
In Spanish dust; for he too, ere he fell,
Hath slain a man. Ah Christ! That murderous eye
Burneth athirst like the red pit of Hell.

FRIENDSHIP'S BLACK AND WHITE

ROMANCE is writ for me with many names
Of fair loved faces, each page a design
Blazoned and tinctured, this with saffron flames
Enshrining fancy, that with opaline
Rays of mad hopes, half sunlight, half moonshine,
This last with the sole gold of passionate blames
Enjoyed and harvested and made divine
By Love's long memory far outlasting Fame's.
—Leave it untouched, the rose-sweet manuscript.
Youth lies asleep in it, its spellbound knight.
Turn not the leaves lest he should wake dismayed.
This page alone stands open, unequipped
Of any hue save friendship's black and white,
Named with one name that needs not be afraid.

IN MEMORIAM W.M. & E.B.J.

MAD are we all, maids, men, young fools alike and old,
All we that wander blind and want the wit to dare.
Dark through the world we go, dazed sheep, across life's wold,
Edged from the flowers we loved by our herd's crook of care.
Life? Have we lived it? No. We were not as these
were,

Intent, untiring souls who proved time till their death.
Nay we were sluggards, all, how crazed in our despair
Each day of their fame won here nobly witnesseth.
—What is life's wealth? To do. Its loss? To dream
and wait.

Years vanish unfulfilled; but work achieved lives on.
Not all Time's beauty died when these two fell asleep.
Dear Madeline, if we grieve our own less strenuous fate,
Heaven send us still this strength, this joy, now they are gone
At least like these to love, even though mad fools we weep.

TO A DISCIPLE OF WILLIAM MORRIS

STAND fast by the ideal. Hero be,
You in your youth, as he from youth to age.
Dare to be last, least, in good modesty,
Nor fret thy soul for speedier heritage.
Even as he lived, live thou, laborious, sage,
Yielding thy flower, leaf, fruitage seasonably,
Content if but some beauty in Time's page
Out of thy being spring and live through thee.
Churl Fame shall grudge (ah, let it grudge!) thee glory.
Knaves have earned that. Behold, the blossoming thorn
Emblazoneth the hedge where fools made foray,
Redeemeth their sad flouts and jibes forlorn.
Ere thou shalt guess, the nightingale thy story
Learning shall speak of thee and shame their scorn.

TO A DEAD JOURNALIST

THE busy trade of life is over now,
 The intricate toil which was so hard for bread,
 The strife each day renewed 'neath this poor brow
 By this frail hand to be interpreted,
 The zeal, the forethought, the heart's wounds that bled,
 The anger roused, the stark blow answering blow,
 All that was centred in that aching head
 Of black necessity for weal or woe.
 —Its use, its purpose what? Nay, less than none,
 More blindly naught than even the dull clay
 Left on this bed, its corporal union done,
 Which we must shovel to its grave to-day.
 O soul of Man, thou pilgrim of distress
 Lost in Time's void! Thou wind of nothingness!

THE ROWFANT CATALOGUE

FRIENDS had he many, neighbours next to none.
 Rowfant and Crabbet lay few fields apart.
 Each Sunday saw him here, his church drill done,
 Duly stroll in to talk of books and art,
 Entrapped, may-be, to share my modest tart,
 Roast fowl and claret, and an evening won
 In stealth from Sabbath bonds strange to his heart.
 Childlike he prized these truant bursts of fun.
 —Long years ago! It needs his wit to jog
 Old time to life. Yet I remember well
 Companioning him home to the hill's top
 Keen on his books, and how he paused to tell
 Eager the first news of this Catalogue.
 Reading it, see, the tears come and I stop.

ON A GRAVE IN THE FOREST

HUSH, gentle stranger. Here lies one asleep
In the tall grass whom we must not awaken.
For see, the wildest winds hush here and keep
Silence for her and not a leaf is shaken,
Lest she should wake and find herself forsaken.
Close to my feet aweary did she creep
And slept, and she is sweetly still mistaken
Deeming I stand by her and watch her sleep.
—Hush, gentle stranger! One as gentle lies
In this poor grave, and weep before you go
For one who knew no weeping, yet abode
Among our human sorrows and was wise
With tenderer sympathy than tears can show,
The gentlest kindest creature made by God.

ALFRED TENNYSON

TEARS, idle tears! Ah, who shall bid us weep,
Now that thy lyre, O prophet, is unstrung?
What voice shall rouse the dull world from its sleep
And lead its requiem as when Grief was young,
And thou in thy rapt youth, Time's bards among,
Captured our ears, and we looked up and heard
Spring's sweetest music on thy mourning tongue
And knew thee for Pain's paradisaical bird.
We are alone without thee in our tears,
Alone in our mute chauntings. Vows are vain
To tell thee how we loved thee in those years
Nor dream to look upon thy like again.
We know not how to weep without thy aid,
Since all that tears would tell thyself hast said.

IRELAND'S VENGEANCE

THIS is thy day, thy day of all the years.
Ireland ! The night of anger, and mute gloom,
Where thou didst sit, has vanished with thy tears.
Thou shalt no longer weep in thy lone home
The dead they slew for thee, or nurse thy doom,
Or fan the smoking flax of thy desire
Their hatred could not quench. Thy hour is come ;
And these, if they would reap, must reap in fire.
—What shall thy vengeance be ? In that long night
Thou hast essayed thy wrath in many ways,
Slaughter and havoc and Hell's deathless spite.
They taught thee vengeance who thus schooled thy days,
Taught all they knew, but not this one divine
Vengeance, to love them. Be that vengeance thine !

A PERFECT SONNET

Oh, for a perfect sonnet of all time !
Wild music, heralding immortal hopes,
Strikes the bold prelude. To it from each clime,
Like tropic birds on some green island slopes,
Thoughts answering come, high metaphors, brave tropes,
In ordered measure and majestic rhyme.
And, presently, all hearts, kings', poets', popes',
Throb to the truth of this new theme sublime.
Anon 'tis reason speaks. A note of death
Strengthens the symphony yet fraught with pain,
And men seek meanings with abated breath,
Vexing their souls,—till lo, once more, the strain
Breaks through triumphant, and Love's master voice
Thrills the last phrase and bids all joy rejoice.

HE MAKES AN END

WHAT shall I tell you, dear, who have told all,
What do, whose wish, whose will is manacled,
What dare, whose duty at your festival
Is but to light the candles round Love's bed ?
How can I sing to you uncomforted
By any crumb of kindness Joy lets fall ?
Unsexed am I by service, heart and head.
Nay, let me sleep and turn me to the wall.
—Alas there is a day when all joy dies,
Through stress of time and tears' thin nourishment
And that dumb peace of Age which veils the end.
Here am I come, and here I close my eyes,
With what I may of dreams (they naught portend),
Framing your face, the last before Love went.

LATER LYRICS

LATER LYRICS

GHOST OF THE BEAUTIFUL PAST

GHOST of the beautiful past, of the days long gone, of a queen, of a fair sweet woman.

Ghost with the passionate eyes, how proud, yet not too proud to have wept, to have loved, since to love is human.

Angel in fair white garments, with skirts of lawn, by the autumn wind on the pathway fluttered,
Always close by the castle wall and about to speak. But the whisper dies on her lips unuttered.

Yellow leaves deep strewn on the sward, dead leaves of a far-off glorious summer.

Yea, the leaves of the roses she plucked, petal by petal, with beating heart, for him the delayed loved comer.

Why doth she weep thus year on year ? He hath tarried long, ah me, a thousand desolate years.

Why doth she weep ? She hath wept enough. For see, dark down in the gardens dim, a lake. It is filled with her tears.

If I should ask her name, her title with men ? But I need not ask it. I know it, alas, of old, though of old unspoken.

Is there another name but one for that face divine, for those sad sweet lips, like a bow unbent, like a bent bow broken ?

No, it is none but her's, the Queen, the beloved of all, the beloved of one, when the Table Round was set in thy mead, Carleon.

None but hers, who was Guenevere, when the trumpets blew and the knights full clad rode down to joust at noon, with their clamorous shout, "The Queen!"

Doth she remember all, or is all forgotten, pennon proud and lance in rest, the thunder of hoofs and the light swift tread of the foremost runner?

Dareth she raise her eyes, those passionate eyes, at the crowd that gazed? None of them all might meet her look, save he, her one true passionate knight, who adoring won her.

Surely, surely, she seeth; she knoweth all; she is no lost vision of death.

She hath still a smile deep hidden.. She hath a name on her lips. She shall sigh, she shall speak, she shall move, when the light winds breathe from the Western Seas with the Spring that quickeneth.

Oh, she shall laugh and sing, though the shadow of Death be a cloud behind her!

Oh, she shall love! Though the dragon of grief keep watch, he shall sleep when the trees in the mead grow green, and awaking he shall not find her.

Read me a sweeter meaning, O Lady, O thou whom I serve, of this pictured story.

Read. Nay the tale is told. To it's truth I swear, by my sword, by my knightly faith, by the fame of the King and the Table Round, and the souls of the Saints in glory!

LOVE IS MASTER STILL

SINCE that it may not be,
The thing my soul desires,
And that Love's tenderer fires
Are doomed to loss and Time's sterility,
Ours be it this one day
Flowers at Love's feet to lay,
For Love is master still, or be we bond or free.

We may not quite be blest.
Time's treasure is too great,
And ours too weak a fate,
And Joy burns low, a sun-flame in the West.
Night comes, the while we stand
Forlornly hand in hand,
And then the tears begin, the dreams that have no rest.

Yet, since it may not be,
And Love can not be wise,
And in each other's eyes
We still must seek Time's lost felicity,
Ours be it this last day
Flowers on Love's grave to lay,
For Love is master still, or be we bond or free.

A CHAUNT IN PRAISE

How many hymns have I chaunted, Lady, in laud of thee,
Each with a sigh for its burthen, tear for its antiphon ?
Love-songs are sweet in the morning. All things in praise
of thee
Evening and morning rejoice, intoning in unison.

Noontide and night have I heard them, birds in the bul-
rushes,
Ewes with their lambs in the pastures, winds in the
wilderness,
Doves as they light in the palm-tops, moans of the water-
wheel,
Eagles and ravens exulting, all speak the name of thee.

Fair is thy face, as the first star seen in the western sky
Robed in the rose of the sunset, pure in its loneliness.
Angels look down from its windows, smile on the world of
men,
Near yet afar from their grieving. Thou too hast
smiled on me.

Crown me with bays, nay, with roses. What should I do
with bays,
Emblems of earthly ambition, I who but live for love ?
Earn me reward of the red rose, thine and love's laureate,
Thus with the flower of thy kindness crowning my
constancy.

Deign to accept an allegiance due to thy royalty.
Empires are thine. Be my kingdom here at thy knees
to kneel.
Not till thou speak will I raise me, turn to life's empti-
ness,
Ashes and dust for my portion, O thou most pitiful !

Verily grief is love's sister. Therefore I weave for thee
Anthems of grief and of true love born of thy loveli-
ness.
Read and forget, and to-morrow, lo, where my path hath
been,
Eagles and ravens exulting scream from the wilderness.

COUPLETS IN PRAISE

Poet of love, I sing here my 'whole soul to you.
Ah, might I all deeds dare, love would I prove to you.

Make I at least your praise, chaplet of sunny verse,
Each dear delight of you told to the universe.

Let me your sweetnesses, O child, enumerate.
All the proud wealth of you Love shall remunerate.

"Glory to God," I sigh each time I gaze at you.
Eyes that have wept all night thrill in amaze at you.

Night in your dark hair sleeps, caught in the net of it,
Emblem how dear of dreams pure as the jet of it.

Valiant joy crowns your brow, stainless its ivory.
Incense your sweet lips breathe, rose-red their livery.

Earth has no part in you. Yet do your eyes to-night
Vanquish all Earth for me, wise in their wise delight.

Evening and morning still watch your feet shod with
dew,
Answering praise and prayer, fearless, your God with
you.

Dare to delight our souls steeped in love's tenderness.
Earn us a wage of joy saved from the wilderness.

Lo, how my heart leaps up new life inheriting.
Armed for the fight am I, all your praise meriting.

Idly if I have lived, now am I glorious,
Daring all deeds for you, yours and victorious.

Empires shall bend and break; kingdoms shall crumble
down.

Wise men shall bow the knee; wise ones look humble
down.

You are the cause of it. Only your name it is
Nerves me to fight the fight stern with life's vanities.

Die! Ay, to die for you, foremost in rivalry,
Heroes to dig my grave: that were true chivalry.

All lovers there should sing, all who had wit any,
Mourn me and weep with you. Here ends my litany.

SONG: LOVE IN THE SUMMER HILLS

I

Love in the summer hills,
With youth to mock at ills,
And kisses sweet to cheat
Our idle tears away.
What else has Time in store,
Till Life shall close the door?
Still let me sing love's lore,
Come sorrow when it may.

II

Rain on the weeping hills,
With Death to end our ills,
And only thought unsought
To point our joys' decay.
Oh Life is wounded sore
And Grief's mad waters roar.
Yet will I love once more
To-day as yesterday.

WHOM THE GODS LOVE

WHOM the gods love die young. Ah, do not doubt of it.

Laura did well to die. Our loss was a gain for her,
Ours who so loved her laughter, ours who at thought of it
Shrink from a wound yet tender, wailing in vain for her.

Full was her life, a well-spring, brimmed to the brink of it,
Giving of its abundance alms to humanity.

We, with our life's cup empty, paused there to drink of it,
Rose with our souls ennobled, purged of their vanity.

Which of us all but loved her, knelt to her, prayed to her?

She was our queen, our Soul-saint, first in our Calendar.

"Laura," our lips breathed, "Laura," vowing our aid to
her,

Each as her fame's proclaimer, champion and challenger.

Which but might deem she loved him? Which, when she
smiled on him,

Nursed not for his consoling dreams of felicity?

Which, in her eyes, read no hope, when like a child on him

Turned she those orbs appealing masked in simplicity?

Nay, there was none went wounded, even when "No" to
him

Came as the last sad answer ending his argument.

"No?" 'Twas hope's affirmation, boding no woe to him,

Rather a sweet postponing framed for encouragement.

Why should he weep? He wept not. Dear was her way
with him.

Had she not given of all things more than he gave to
her?

Had not her lips poured plenty, wise words and gay with
him ?

Why should his farewell falter, fool hands not wave to her ?

I too with these essayed love. ' I too my joy with her
Sought in her wild girl's garden, idly, a censurer,
Learned what the rest had learned there, deemed like a
boy with her

I too, that Laura loved me, kneeled my heart's venturer,

Woored her and went forth weeping, yet with her name
for me

Stored as a sweet remembrance deep in the heart of me,
Grieving my day departed ; still as high fame for me
Chaunting it, each sad eyening, proud as a part of me.

Whom the gods love ! Ay truly. Why should we mourn
for her

Dowered with all youth for portion, spared our infirmity ?
Nay, 'twere for her to pity us, the forlorn for her,
Laughing her gay girl's laughter, glad through Eternity.

WITH ETERNITY STANDING BY

How shall I bid you good-bye,

Dear, without tears ?

Only once in the years,

The idle vanishing years,

We met, with Eternity standing by,

And loved, a little forgotten space,

I for the sake of your beautiful face,

You I hardly know how or why,

Or whether you loved me indeed, alas,

With Eternity standing by.

We played our comedy parts,
Scene after scene.
You were to be my queen,
My dear sweet comedy queen,
I your lover and knave of hearts
Who kissed your hand in the make-believe
And looked for the bee in your royal sleeve,
And stopped, because of the pain that smarts,
The pangs that soften, the sighs that grieve,
And the rest of the tragic parts.

We did not know that we loved,
Not at the first of it.
That, ah that was the worst of it,
The aching sorrowful worst of it,
Not till I saw that your soul was moved
At the sound of my voice, as in tears I read
Of Guinevere and the days long dead,
And the knights and ladies who lived and loved
And went to their graves and were harvested.
Then, ah then, it was proved.

So I dare not bid you good-bye,
Dear, without tears.
Things there are in the years,
The coming ominous years,
All too sad for us not to cry.
Other joys shall forgotten be,
But not the pilgrimage made with me,
The Severn's flood and the angry sky,
And the love we talked of, which could not be
With Eternity standing by.

MY ONLY TITLE

My only title to her grace
Is her sad, too silent face ;
All my right to call her mine
The twin tears that on it shine,
Tears that tell of griefs long hid
In the shadows of each lid,
And of doubts that wound her sore
Our twin lives shall meet no more.
Nay, my right and title this,
That she gave me one shy kiss
'Twixt the dawning and the day,
Benediction on my way,
When the vain world was asleep
And no ear to hear us weep,
And that once my fingers pressed
The warm treasures of her breast,
Just a moment, and the truth
Learned of her close-hidden youth
With its joys and sweetnesses
Deep beyond all wit to guess,
All but mine, and what might be
Were she wholly joined with me.

Such my title is and treasure,
Such my glory beyond measure,
Such my thought for the new years,
Burdened with what doubts and fears,
Yet one day to claim her mine.
Here, beyond this shadowy Rhine,
Far from her and journeying still,
Feel I her young pulses thrill,

Her warm body nestled close
To my own with all its woes.
And I know that some far hour
I shall call to her with power,
When the sun is fast in prison
And the midnight stars have risen
Clear and kind in a warm sky,
And the shepherd's hour is nigh,
In a language she shall heed,
"Life is fleeting, love hath need.
Time it is tears should not be.
Come, my love, and dwell with me."
And I know that without stay,
'Twixt the dawning and the day,
When the vain world is asleep
And no ear to hear her weep,
She shall dry her tears and come ;
And we too through Christendom
And beyond this shadowy Rhine,
With its fields of corn and wine,
And the snow-clad Alps and Rome,
And the blue sea capped with foam,
And far-famed Constantinople
With its domes of pearl and opal,
And the sea of Marmora,
Where the dolphins sport and play,
And the utmost isles of Greece
Guarding still their golden fleece,
As when Paris to them came
With his Helen all aflame
On their glorious honeymoon ;
And so on from noon to noon
Journeying still and still beyond,
Fond as they and yet more fond,
To the ancient tearless East

Shall be borne as to a feast,
And sit down there our lives long,
With Love's silence for our song
And Love's guile for our disguise,
While I teach her to be wise.
And my title to her grace
Shall the smiles be on her face,
Her blue eyes, where no tears be,
Being wholly joined with me.

SEA LAVENDER

LAVENDER, sea lavender !
Pale sweet flower how full of her !
Flower discreet, with your priest's eyes
Trained in all time's mysteries,
Yet how chastely calmly sealed !
Flower of passions unrevealed,
Stainless eyes, but none the less
Wise in life's most nakedness,
With its inward hours of sin,
Known to thee, and all therein ;
And how soul with soul found might,
In the watches of the night,
Cherishing an unseen joy,
Man with woman, girl with boy,
Under the sky's multitude,
Till the pulsings of their blood
Led them into ways unknown,
Flesh of flesh and bone of bone
Clasped in one, till doubt was over,
And they went forth loved and lover
Bride and groom to their new home.

See, to-day to you I come,
Flower of wisdom who know all,
To your mute confessional,
Wanting love and wanting her,
(Lavender, sea lavender !)
In a world where she is not,
Mined with plot and counterplot
Built against our happiness.
You, who know her most, can guess
What her thought is far from me,
What soft wind of memory
Fans her with a scent of pleasure,
What sweet song in what sweet measure
Trilled by birds when day was breaking
And each tremulous throat awaking
Strained to make its passion heard
Louder there than other bird,
While we listened, we too, straining
Heart to heart, and watched the waning
Moon fade slowly like a feather
In the red East, close together,
Near, how near, who now are far.
Tell me what her fancies are.
Does she love still ? Does she cherish,
In the waste of days that perish
That one dawn, which cannot die ?
Nay, I know it, nor will I
Doubt of love or doubt of her,
(Lavender, sea lavender !)
Since she knows and understands
That my hands still hold her hands.

'DON JUAN'S GOOD-NIGHT

(From the French)

Teach me, gentle Leporello,
Since you are so wise a fellow,
How your master I may win.
Leporello answers gaily
Slip into his bed and way lay
Him ; anon he shall come in.

Soon as he shall find you laid there
Fresh and young, so sweet a maid there,
He shall smile, and joyfully
" I am hungry, Leporello,
Bring us wine, good wine and mellow,
Here is one would sup with me."

Wine then will I bring (not water),
A feast fit for a king's daughter,
Lay it out in the alcove,
While my Lord with pleasant fancies
Makes his court to you, romances
Of your beauty and his love.

Passion soon shall rise full blossom ;
He shall weep upon your bosom,
Make you all his soul's display.
He, in honour as a true man,
Shall declare you the sole woman
He has loved until to-day.

LATER LYRICS

At the last he shall possess you,
And all night. Then with " God bless you "

Turn to sleep, nor shall you know,
Curtained in your silks and satins,
How at dawn he was off " to matins.
His politeness called it so.

But remember, from next morning
You must quite forget the adorning

Of to-night, or earn his curse.
Gold is yours if you but ask it,
Spain and Flanders in a basket.
I am keeper of his purse.

To console you he a fortune
Will not grudge. But to importune

His more tenderness ? Nay, Nay.
A return to even your beauty
Were too costly a Duke's duty,
One his whole wealth could not pay.

A STORM IN SUMMER

NATURE that day a woman was in weakness,
A woman in her impotent high wrath.
At the dawn we watched it, a low cloud half seen
Under the sun ; an innocent child's face
It seemed to us rose-red and fringed with light
Boding no hurt, a pure translucent cloud,
Deep in the East where the Sun's disk began.
We did not guess what strengths in it were pent
What terrors of rebellion. An hour more,
And it had gathered volume and the form
Of a dark mask, the she-wolf's of old Rome,

The ears, the brow, the cold un pitying eyes,
Through which gleams flashed. And, as we watched, the roll
Of thunder from a red throat muttering
Gave menace, of the wild beast close at hand.
Anon a wall of darkness in the South
Black to the Zenith, and a far-off wail,
The wind among the trees.—And then, behold,
Flying before it a mad clamorous rout
Of peewits, starlings, hawks, crows, dishwashers,
Blackbirds and jays, by hundreds, scattering,
While the Earth trembled holding as it were its breath;
Till suddenly an answer from the ground,
And the fields shook and a new mighty roar
Crashed through the oaks, and in a pent-up flow
The storm's rage broke in thunder overhead,
And all the anger of the passionate heaven
Burst into tears.

JEWELLED OFFERING

JEWELLED offering bring I none,
Jade or pearl or precious stone,
Urn of crystal, bale of spice,
Unguent culled in Paradise,
Dye how deep of rainbow hue,
Dust of gold from Cambalu,
Ivory throne with sandal-wood
Inlaid all and scented ood,
Tent of silk whose tapestries
Tell of tears in ladies' eyes,
Heavenly tears, 'neath moon and star,
Hopes that were and joys that are,
Ambient ever in love's soul
Armed with might and near the goal.

Nought, alas, of these I bring.
Necklace, chain, nor nuptial ring.
No bold bridegroom I, to be
Nerved to dreams of chivalry,
Expedited at your word
Earth's whole realm to win by sword,
Daring all things, briar and brake,
Dole and Death for your dear sake,
Onward, upward, heavenward borne,
(O thou rose without a thorn !)
Rivalry in deeds to show,
Rodomont or Romeo.

Out, alas ! Such love for us
Outlawed is and vanitous.
Time can touch it not nor cure.
'Tis an ill we must endure,
Howsoever long our days,
Howsoever rich in praise.
Even in Heaven we may not win
Ear for this too sweet a sin,
And no angel voice shall say,
" Ask it, souls, and have your way."
Be consoled then if I make
But this rhyme for birthday's sake,
Leaving love gifts all aside
Light to him shall call you bride,
Unacknowledged and untold,
Useless as Utopian gold.
Nonsense rhymes ! Ah me, such sense
Nesting bird to nestling lends,
Trills of pale parental hue
Tragic only because true.

A WEDDING MARCH

CLASH your cymbals, maids, to-day.
Chaunt the praise of Cynthia.
You, her virgins, yokeless, free,
Young Time's choice, his brides-to-be.
Nymphs in white, who hand in hand
Next to her high altar stand,
Take your timbrels, strike your strings ;
Tune them to Love's clamourings.
Heralds be of her your fairest,
Her of rarities the rarest.
Instant all her laud rehearse,
Idol of your universe ;
And thus armed stand forth and say,
" All is nought but Cynthia."

Clash your cymbals. Beat your drums.
Cynthia in her glory comes,
High with him whose duty is
Her to lead to a new bliss.
Ah, what fortune his to be
Angel of her ecstasy !
Red with roses Love's path lies,
Rich in rainbows of surprise.
They that tread it wiser are
Than the wise kings with their star,
Eve and morn who went pursuing
Eve's old hopes to Time's undoing,
Robbing Time of his vain wrath.
Run to Love ; take all he hath,
Idle maids ! Nay, shout and sing,
In Love's praise new chorusing,
Stintless this thrice happy day.
Shout aloud for Cynthia !

A CUCKOO SONG

CROWNS are for kings to wear, sad crowns of gold
Over tired heads that ache, world-cares untold.
Not on thy happy brows, sweet bird of summer,
Set we such crowns to-day, thou Spring's new-comer.
Take from us, rather, thou these our wild posies.
April's and May's we bring, June's with its roses.
Nay and love's Cuckoo flowers, O child of glory!
Cuckoos thine own birds are; these be thy dowry.
Eve of our heart's shut field, need is we grieve thee,
Gone to a world more sweet where we must leave thee.
Russet-clad nightingales, tired of our chaunting,
Out in the dark we weep, our Queen-bird wanting.
Such is the fate of birds. Soon as the Spring comes
Vagrant they flit and fly. Lo! 'tis their King comes.
Endeth our night plaint only when, through the wild wood,
New born the day trips in, laughs as a child would.
O, then we too will laugh, join in the gay chime,
Run to thy marriage bells, birds of the day-time.

MANY ARE CALLED

MANY are called, dear heart, to happiness,
But few are chosen, even for a wild short year.
Love calls us from our sleep, and we make stress
To rise and greet him in a world austere
With a sweet dawn, while blithe as chanticleer
He carols his brave message; and we loosen
The shutters of our grief to find him near.
Many are called by Love, but few are chosen.

Love's voice is truth. He speaks his messages

In tones we dare not doubt, and we give ear
As to a prophet of our wilderness,

The glorious lord of a new hemisphere.

And we run, we too, glorious, without fear,
Like children on bright ice too thinly frozen,

Gay to our doom. Ah me ! The plunge was sheer.
Many are called by Love, but few are chosen.

Love chooses whom he will to ban or bless.

My fate was a wild shepherd's on the drear
Plains of wan hope, whose one-time shepherdess

Was lost even in the winning, and whose cheer

Has since been of the yellow leaf and sere,
(Scorned is the rose-tree Time finds no last rose on)

And silence claims him and the end is near.
Many are called by Love, but few are chosen.

Queen of my life ! I do not love you less

Because you choose not me to cast your woes on.

It is enough for me you once said " Yes."

Many are called by Love, but few are chosen.

JACINTHS AND JESSAMINES

JACINTHS and jessamines and jonquils sweet,
All odorous pale flowers from Orient lands,
No vain red roses strew I at thy feet,
Emblems of grief and thee, with reverent hands.
Mine is no madrigal of passionate joy,
Or orison of aught less chaste than tears.
Ruth on thy brow sits fairest. Its annoy
Rends not thy beauty's raiment, nor the years.
In thy shut lips what secrets ! Who am I
Should seek a sign at that dread sanctuary ?

AN INSCRIPTION

At this fair oak table sat
Whilom he our Laureate,
Poet, handicraftsman, sage,
Light of our Victorian age,
William Morris, whose art's plan
Laid its lines in ample span,
Wrought it, trestle board and rib,
With good help of Philip Webb,
For an altar of carouse
In his own home, the Red House.
Thirty years and five here he
Made good cheer and company,
Feasting all with more than bread.
Had men stored the things he said,
Jests profound and foolings wise,
Truths unlied of lies,
Basenesses chastised and set
Like hounds slain beneath his feet,
Knowledge prodigally poured,
His best wine, at this free board ;
Nay, if but the crumbs he shed
Nightly round of heart and head
Gleaned had we, not this good hall
Half the wonders might install,
Wit's wealth lost, which now must sleep
Dumb when we have ceased to weep.

ASSASSINS

ASSASSINS find accomplices. Man's merit
Has found him three, the hawk, the hound, the ferret.

SONG: IF I FORGET THEE

If I forget thee ! How shall I forget thee ?
Sword of the mighty ! Prince and Lord of War !
Captive I bind me
To the spears that blind me,
Rage in my heart and love for evermore.

If I forget thee ! How shall I forget thee ?
Man the destroyer ! Life that made mine move !
They that come after
Let them earn my laughter,
Ay, but my anger, never, nor my love.

If I forget thee ! How should I forget thee ?
One man there is no woman dares despise.
Hate him it may be,
Wound him if the way be,
Nay, but forget him ? Not before she dies !

TO NIMUE

I HAD clean forgotten all, her face who had caused my
trouble.
Gone was she as a cloud, as a bird which passed in the wind,
as a glittering stream-borne bubble,
As a shadow set by a ship on the sea, where the sail looks
down on its double.

I had laid her face to the wall, on the shelf where my
fancies sleep.

I had laid my pain in its grave, in its rose-leaf passionless
grave, with the things I had dared not keep.

I had left it there. I had dried my tears. I had said, "Ah,
why should I weep?"

I will not be fooled by her, by the spell of her fair child's
face.

What is its meaning to me, who have seen, who have known,
who have loved what miracle forms of grace?

What are its innocent wiles, its smiles, its idle sweet girlish-
ness?

I will not love without love. I despise the ways of a fool.
Let me prevail as of old, as lover, as lord, as king, or have
done with Love's tyrant rule.

I was born to command, not serve, not obey. No boy am
I in Love's school.

I have fled to the fields, the plains, the desert places of rest,
To the forest's infinite smile, where the cushat calls from
the trees and the yaffle has lined her nest,
To the purple hills with the spray of the sea, when the wind
blows loud from the west.

I have done with her love and her, the wine-draughts of
human pleasure.

The voice of nature is best, the cradle song of the trees
which is hymned to Time's stateliest measure,

As once a boy in the woods I heard it and held it an ex-
quisite treasure.

I had clean forgotten all. I had sung to the indolent hills
Songs of joy without grief, since grief is of human things
the shadow of human ills.

I sang aloud in my pride of song to the chime of the answering
rills.

And, behold, the whole world heard, the dull mad man-
ridden Earth.

And they cried, "A prophet hath risen, a sage with the heart
of a child, a bard of no human birth,

A soul that hath known nor pain, nor sin, a singer of in-
finite mirth."

And she too heard it and came. And she knew it was I
grown wise.

And she stood from the rest apart, and I watched her with
pitying scorn, and then with a sad surprise,

And last with a new sweet passionate joy, for I saw there
were tears in her eyes.

And she came and sat at my feet, as in days ere our
grief began.

And I saw her a woman grown. And I was a prophet no
more, but a desolate voiceless man.

And I clasped her fast in my arms in joy and kissed her
tears as they ran.

And I shall not be fooled by her, though her face is fair as
a rose.

And I shall not live without love, though the world should
forget my songs and I should forget its woes.

And the purple hills should forget the sea and the spray
when the west wind blows.

**PARAPHRASES · FROM THE
FRENCH**

QUEEN MARY'S LETTER TO BOTHWELL

PITIFUL gods ! Have pity on my passion.
Teach me the road how I a certain proving
Shall make to him I love of my great loving,
My faith unchanged, nor plead it in fool's fashion.

Ah, is he weary of too full possession,
Of this poor body's zeal which naught denied him,
Of a Queen's pride enthroned too near beside him,
Her parliament of joy in too long session ?

Nay, but she held as naught for him her honour,
Naught her friends' loyalty, their wrath her foemen.
Less than as naught the proud eyes of her women,
The load of a realm's anger laid upon her.

If it might vantage him ! Behold me dying,
To prove my constancy, bequeathing all,
Fame, fortune, faith, my life's memorial,
The one son born to me, nor ought denying.

Queen am I with no subjects. Subject I
To my sole king. My country ? 'Tis his pleasure.
There would I reign, who find in it my treasure,
For treasure-house his arms, and there ~~would~~ lie.

Without those frontiers would I wander never.

I am no vagrant to take ship and go.

This is my haven. Whatso winds shall blow,
They shall not tempt me to a new endeavour.

And yet he doubteth ! Lo, the proof I offer :

Not tears, not prayers ; a manlier test is mine.

Let others plead in weakness ; my soul's wine
Has a strong logic which shall find no scoffer.

She, thy right lady for her own pride's sake,

Vowed thee obedience. 'Twas her debt of duty.

I for my shame made free gift of my beauty,
Holding it royaller to give than take.

She to her profit bindeth thee her lover,

Being thus mistress of thy wealth and name ;

I to my hurt, in peril of my fame,
And dreading all men should my shame discover.

She dreadeth nothing ; I have lost my daring.

She of her parents took thee proud to give ;

I in despite of mine, who still must live
Fearing worse fortune through my too much caring.

And thou believest her ! Although she reapeth

All her delight of thee, her place, her glory,

Her noble name who had no name in story,
(And I a queen !) Half of thy love she keepeth,

Love which was mine ! And in exchange for what ?

A girl's fool fancy for a boy aspirant.

How should she love thee not, thou master tyrant,
Her wedded lord, in room of that sad sot ?

Mad were she else, since thou of all art master,
Supreme in valour, beauty and men's praise,
Thee in whose light I live out all my days.
How should I pity her her soul's disaster ?

When first you wooed her, it was she the colder,
You the more fierce ; your flame raged as a furnace,
She shrank from you abashed at love's sweet harness,
Raised a maid's finger as your zeal grew bolder.

No pleasure took she in your strength. She doubted
Naught of your constancy who least could care.
Small joy she made for you of braided hair
Or happy raiment, going meanly clouted.

Why should she deck herself ? Her heart no faster
Beat, nor when even at death's door you lay.
Calmly she watched you in that disarray,
Nor trembled for you till Fate's fear had passed her.

And she lamenteth now, and moan she maketh,
Noting the petulance of her first folly,
Waileth aloud in wifely melancholy,
And blindeth thee with feint of that she lacketh.

What tales are hers ! What flatteries now she weaveth,
In her false letters, as one more than I
Vowed to thy worship in long constancy
To a loved paramour ! And he believeth !

Lies all ! tales taken from some alien rhymer
Richer than she in words to cozen you.
Her woes are painted every week anew
On her green cheeks, each than the last sublimer.

And you give faith to her, to me light credence,
Though all my joy, my constancy is yours,
A flame which needs no kindling and endures,
Claiming its place by right of long precedence.

Too plain, alas, it is you hold me lightly,
Deem me with heart of wax, with words of wind,
A woman indiscreet and all too kind
To all the world, with a new lover nightly.

This is your ill thought which the more inflames me,
Humbling my pride, till I no longer crave
More than a share to-day of that you gave
So wholly yesterday. Your doubting shames me.

To-day I ask but this, to do you reverence,
To heap you worship and make full your fame,
To work for you the building of your name
Joined to my own. For this I bar our severance.

It is for you I supplicate my fortune,
My health restored, my strength, that you may learn
The fullness of my love and sweet concern
So dear to serve you. Thus do I importune ;

Since that no wish have I but still to merit
Your life's companionship, who first of men
Possessed my body though less wholly then
My joy of heart which I of you inherit.

How many tears for you have I not wasted,
How much of anguish suffered and disgrace !
That day I saw the blood flow on your face
I knew ~~for~~ mine ; 'twas my own death I tasted.

A day that was the last of my high queenship,
Of my life's honour held to-day in scorn,
Of my friends' faith even here where I was born
With those that nursed me or were near in kinship.

To-day I put aside their tried alliance.
Yours only do I seek, which shall sustain
My woman's weakness and make strong my reign,
And give meet answer to my foes' defiance.

This my presumption is, my reckoning this is,
The one desire of her who is your friend,
Who would your mistress be to her life's end
And serve you with her tenderest tendernesses,

You who to her are as her soul's sole brother,
A woman in subjection to your will,
To live and die for you your servant still,
You only of all men and not another.

Take it, my heart, my life, my blood, my all,
The pleasure of my days, my nights of anguish,
The lovelessness of hours where lone I languish,
And build them with me to a festival.

For now my heart is palsied with long fearings
Of this, of that, the fear lest you forget,
Lest tales be told of me, lest snares be set
To lure you from my arms to new endearings,

Some pitiful sad accident of sorrow,
Which may God shield us from with his good grace.
My fears I write who cannot see your face
Yet know my love as yesterday to-morrow.

And so farewell. Nay answer not in censure.
Be bountiful of praise nor count the cost.
Learn that that man is king who dareth most,
And his the victory who most shall venture.

THE DESERT WIND

I WENT with happy heart (how happy !) a while since
Behind my camel flocks,
Piping all day where the Nile pastures end
And the white sand begins
Among the rocks.
The wheeling eagles mocked me high there from the skies,
The red blast of the desert wind
Hath seared mine eyes.

I saw a lady pass, (what lady ?) none could tell,
Nor of her tribe nor race,
Of Roum or Franjistan or Fars or Hind ;
None knew. But I knew well
That her sweet face
Had blossomed first within the gates of Paradise.
The red blast of the desert wind
Hath seared mine eyes.

Within a tasselled frame, rich wrought, she sat and sang
A song of love so sweet,
That beast and bird and serpent came behind,
And lizard with shut fang
And faltering feet.
My flocks strayed after them, and I who heard likewise.
The red blast of the desert wind
Hath seared mine eyes.

Upon a camel tall (how tall !) she rode by me
 Enrobed in white and red,
And veiled to her bright eyes in bands that bind
 But hide not all souls see ;
 And on her head
A crown entwined of wool with gold and various dyes.
 The red blast of the desert wind
 Hath seared mine eyes.

Out to the wilderness, all day, we followed her.
 By winding paths untrod,
O'er rock and plain none knew nor I could find,
 Although my home was there ;
 And still we rode.
The creatures tired and stopped ; but I went on with sighs.
 The red blast of the desert wind
 Hath seared mine eyes.

We came to a deep pool (how deep !) I knew of none
 In all that land accursed,
A pool of waters clear with white shells lined,
 And there we lighted down
 And suaged our thirst,
And bathed our weary limbs, we two without disguise.
 The red blast of the desert wind
 Hath seared mine eyes.

Upon the brink we sat (ah me !) alone, we two,
 In that fair empty place.
I kissed her hands and told her all my mind,
 And dared her grace to sue,
 Her utter grace.
And she with smiles said "yea" to my too blest surprise.
 The red blast of the desert wind
 Hath seared mine eyes.

Ah me, that night of stars, those bridal stars of heaven !
Ah me, those eyes of hers,
So sweet, so near, of that same starry kind,
Which drank their light ungiven,
(Poor blinded stars !)
And left them dark as they have left me wise.
The red blast of the desert wind
Hath seared mine eyes.

How shall I tell it ? All three months of happy love
I lived with her, blest queen,
Fed on sole joy and what God's care might send
Of milk and treasure-trove
Of sorrels green,
And roots and tubers fine and samh which we made prize.
The red blast of the desert wind
Hath seared mine eyes.

Since when I search the Earth (sad Earth !) in vain to win
Once more her wondrous voice,
Which led me forth to doom and left me blind,
Bereft of flocks and kin
And homely joys,
Of wife and children's love and to behold the skies.
The red blast of the desert wind
Hath seared mine eyes.

DEATH IN A BALL-ROOM

Oh many, many thus have died, alas,
Children, poor things ! The grave will have its prey.
Some flowers must still be mown down with the grass,
And in life's wild quadrille the dancers gay
Must ~~trample~~ here and there a weak one in their way.

Yes, thus it is. After the day the night,
A night that has no waking. Who shall tell ?
A joyous crowd sits down to feast aright,
But always some one guest, where all seemed well,
Gets up and leaves his chair and hears the passing bell.

I have seen many go ; cheeks rosy pink,
And blue eyes wide as if entranced with song,
And forms so frail it seemed that on death's brink
A bird had bent the branch to which it clung,
So frail the body was, the tyrant soul so strong.

One knew I who in her delirium
Uttered a name which troubled all around,
And then, like a lost chaunt for ever dumb,
She left us, smiling. In her breast we found
Some faded violets hid, by a blue ribbon bound.

Poor flowers, poor souls, and only born to die ;
Fair fledglings torn untimely from their nest ;
Halcyons our Earth had borrowed from the sky
For one short Spring, and then, as if confessed
Unworthy that high charge, given back to Heaven's breast.

Such have I known ; and such, alas was one
Whom now I picture sadly here. Her eyes
Had gleams where April's fitful beauty shone.
I know not why she heaved so many sighs.
She was sixteen, perhaps, and cared not to be wise.

Yet think not it was love that was her death.
Love had no song for her of any tone.
Her heart had never beat too fast for breath.
Though all men called her pretty, there was none
To whisper that soft fable in her ear alone.

No. It was dancing, dancing which she loved
Beyond all else, that caused her thus to die.
Her very dust, methinks, by night is moved
When the pale moon beneath heaven's canopy
Holds revel with the clouds in the quick-circling sky.

Balls she adored. Each evening that she danced
She thought three days and dreamed three nights of it,
And visions brave where goblin partners pranced
Beset her pillows, till she could not sit
Still in her bed but she must rise and dance a bit.

By night and day her fancy framed the sight
Of scarves and flowers and ribbons bright as noon,
And jewels gleaming with unearthly light,
And skirts of gossamer in wild festoon,
And lace like spiders' webs of spiders in the moon.

When the ball opened, she was first to come
With her proud father, honest gentleman.
Like a little mouse she ran about the room.
Oh how she frowned and rattled with her fan
And beat her pretty foot, until the dance began !

It did us good to see her dance. Her feet
Twinkled like stars in a dark firmament.
They moved so fast they made our pulses beat
Lest those frail laces should be overspent
And the white satin shoes be whirled away or rent.

She was all movement, laughter, and mad joy.
Child ! How we followed her with our sad eyes,
Forgetful of the fever and annoy
And rush and dust and nameless miseries,
The punishment of souls too proud or sad or wise.

But she, borne off upon her pleasure's wing,
Whirled round and round. She never stopped for breath.
She seemed to drink the fiddler's fiddling in.
She seemed to smell the flowers of every wreath,
To dance with every step the dancers danced beneath.

'Twas joy to her to leap and bound along,
To feel as though she had a thousand feet,
To grow so giddy in the turning throng
She knew not where she was. Her heart so beat
She could not see the chairs to find herself a seat.

Alas, alas that ever morn should come
On such sweet nights ! Alas that she must stand
Those hours of woe in the chill waiting room.
Oh, often ere the coach was at command,
The dawn had touched her shoulders with its naked hand.

'Tis ever a sad waking the next day.
No laughter now, but only a dull cough.
The crumpled dresses have been put away.
Pleasure is dead, and there stands Pleasure's scoff,
Fever with cheeks all red and tongue all white and rough.

She died at sixteen, happy, loved by all.
Died as she left off dancing. All of us
Wore mourning long in token of that ball.
She died upon the threshold of the house
In her white robe and wreath and sable-lined burnous.

Death took her thus that she might ever be
Dressed for new dancing. When she wakes again
She shall be ready for Eternity,
And, if in Heaven such raptures are not vain,
Shall tread fair measures still to seraph angels strain.

THE TOAD

O who shall tell us of the truth of things ?
The day was ending blood-red in the West
After a storm. The sun had smelted down
As in a furnace all the clouds to gold.
Upon a cart track by a pool of rain,
Dumbly with calm eyes fixed upon the heavens,
A toad sat thinking. It was wretchedness
That gazed on majesty. Ah, who shall tell
The very truth of things, the hidden law
Of pain and ugliness ? Byzantium bred
Growths of Augustuli, Great Rome her crimes,
As Earth breeds flowers, the firmament its suns,
And the toad too his crop of ulcerous sores. '

The leaves turned purple on the vermeil trees ;
The rain lay like a mirror in the ruts ;
The dying sun shook his last banners out ;
Birds sang in whispers, and the world grew dumb
With the hush of evening and forgetfulness.
Then too the toad forgot himself and all
His daylight shame, as he looked out bright-eyed
Into the sweet face of the coming night
For who shall tell ? He too the accursed one
Dreamt of a blessing. There is not a creature
On whom the infinite heaven hath not smiled
Wildly and tenderly ; no thing impure
Monstrous deformed and hideous but he holds
The immensity of the starlight in his eyes.

A priest came by and saw the unholy thing,
And with his foot, even as his prayers he read,
Trod it aside and shuddered and went on.

A woman with a wild flower in her bosom
Came next and at the eye's light mirrored there
Aimed her umbrella point. Now he was old,
And she was beautiful. Then home from school
Ran four boys with young faces like the dawn.
"I was a child, was weak, was pitiless":
Thus must each man relate who would begin
The true tale of his life. A child hath all,
Joy, laughter, mirth. He is drunk with life's delight.
Hope's day-star breaketh in his innocent eyes.
He hath a mother. He is just a boy,
A little man who breathes the untrammelled air
Clean-winded and clean-limbed, and he is free
And the world loves him. Why should he not then
For lack of sorrow strike the sorrowful!

The toad dragged down the deep track of the road.
It was the hour when from the hollows round
Blue mists steal creeping low upon the fields.
His wild heart sought the night. Just then the children
Came on the fugitive and all together
Cried "Let us kill him. We will punish him
For being so ugly." And at the word they laughed.
(For children laugh when they do murder.) Then
They thrust at him with sticks and where the eye
Bulged from its socket made a ghastlier wound
Opening his sores. The passers by looked on,
And they too laughed. And then the night fell down
Black on the blackness of his martyrdom
Who was so dumb. And when the blood flowed out
It was horrible blood. And he was horrible.
That was his crime.

And still along the lane
The creature sprawled. One foot had been ~~seen~~ away

By a child's spade, and at each new blow aimed
 Its jaws foamed blood, poor damnéd suffering thing,
 Which even when the sun had soothed its hide
 Had skulked in holes. And the children mocked the more :
 " Wretch. Would you spit at us ? "

O strange child's heart !

What rage is thine to pluck thus at the robe
 Of misery and taunt it with its pain ?

And so from clod to clod, from briar to briar,
 But breathing still, in his dull fear he fled
 Seeking a shelter from their tyrannous eyes.
 So mean a thing, it seemed Death shrank from him
 Refusing aid of his all pitying scythe.
 And the children followed on with rushes noosed
 To take him, but he slipped between their hands
 And fell, so chanced it, where the rut'gaped deepest,
 Into a mire of mud ; cool hiding place
 It was and refuge for his mangled limbs,
 And there he quaking lay. The anointing slime
 Soothed his hurt body like a sacrament,
 An extreme unction for his utter need.
 Nor yet was safety won. The children's eyes,
 Abominable eyes, were on him still
 With their hard mirth. " Is there no stone ? " they cried,
 " To end him with ? Here, Jeremiah, Jim,
 Lend us a hand." And willing hands were lent.

Once ~~more~~, O child of Man ! I ask it. Say
 What is the goal of thy desire ? What aim
 Is thine ? What target wouldst thou hit ? What win ?
 Say. Is it ~~death~~ or life ?

The stone was brought,
A ponderous mass, broad as a paving flag,
But light in his young hands that bore it in,
Pride giving strength to lift, and the lust to kill.
“ You shall see what this will do,” the young giant cried.
And all stood near expectant of the end.

And then a new thing happened, a new chance.
A coster’s dray, drawn by an ancient ass,
Passed down the lane. With creaking wheels it came
And slow harsh jolts in the ruts. The ass was lean
And stiff with age, spavined, with foundered feet,
And dead to blows which rained on his dull hide.
Each step he stumbled. He was near his home,
After a long day’s labour in the field,
And began to scent his stable, while the cart
Lagged in the ruts, or with shafts forward thrown
Pressed his galled sides and thrust its load on him,
At the downward slope where the lane left the hill,
More than his strength. A mist was in his eyes
And that dull stupor which foreshadows death.
Thus the cart moved, its driver cursing loud,
Its driven dumb, while the whip cracked in time.
The ass was in his dreams beyond our thought,
Plunged in those depths of soul where no man strays.

And the children heard the cart upon the road.
It gave them a new thought. And “ Stop,” they cried,
“ Let the stone be. We shall have better sport
Here with the wheels. This ass will do the thing.”
And they stood aside and watched what next should come.
And the cart drew near, its wheels sunk in the rut
Where the toad lay, the ass with his dull eyes
Fixed on the path before him, his head down
Nosing the ground in apathy of thought.

And the ass stopped. He, the sad slave of pain,
Had seen the vision of a sadder slave
Needing his pity, and being as it were the judge
To save or slay he had been moved to grace;
He had seen 'and understood. And, gathering up
In a single act supreme of his poor weakness
All that remained to him of combative pride,
He made the grand refusal, mastering
By his last strength the load which pressed on him
With terrible connivance of the hill,
And wrenched the cart wheel from its track of doom
Spite of his tyrant's voice of blasphemy
And its mad curses and his own huge pain,
And so, the victory won, passed on his road.

Then also was it that that child with the stone,
He who now tells this story, from his hands
Let the flag drop. A voice had cried to him
Too loud for denial: "Fool. Be merciful."

O, wisdom of the witless! Law of pity
Loud on the lips of pain! Nature's pure light
Lightening the darkness of Man's gulfs of crime!
Lessons of courage taught by coward hearts,
Of joy by the joyless! Eyes that cannot weep
Pleading with grief and pointing consolation!
The eloquent call of one poor damnéd soul
Preaching to souls elect, the beast to man!
Know this: hours are there, twilight hours of grace,
When, be he what he may, beast, bird or slave,
Each living thing gets glimpses of God's heaven
And knows himself own brother to the stars,
Being one with these in ancestry of love,
Kindred in kindness. Learn that this poor ass,

Facing his pain rather than add to pain,
Was master of his soul in verier deed
Than Socrates was saint, than Plato sage.

Who is the teacher here ? O man of mind !
Wouldst thou touch truth ? The true truth in thee lies,
Thy lack of light. Nay kneel, weep, pray, believe,
Grovel on the Earth. She shall thy teacher be.
A corner of their Heaven thou too shalt win
When thou art dust with these. Then shalt thou too
Get glimpses of their world's ingenuous dawn
And purchase back thy soul's lost purity,
The love that casts out fear and conquers pain,
The link which binds its weak ones with its strong
And equals all in one divine accord,
The unknowing ass with the all-knowing God.

QUATRAINS OF LIFE

QUATRAINS OF LIFE

WHAT has my youth been that I love it thus,
Sad youth, to all but one grown tedious,
 Stale as the news which last week wearied us,
Or a tired actor's tale told to an empty house?

What did it bring me that I loved it, even
With joy before it and that dream of Heaven,
 Boyhood's first rapture of requited bliss,
What did it give? What ever has it given?

Let me recount the value of my days,
Call up each witness, mete out blame and praise,
 Set life itself before me as it was,
And—for I love it—list to what it says.

Oh, I will judge it fairly. Each old pleasure
Shared with dead lips shall stand a separate treasure.
 Each untold grief, which now seems lesser pain,
Shall here be weighed and argued of at leisure.

I will not mark mere follies. These would make
The count too large and in the telling take
 More tears than I can spare from seemlier themes
To cure its laughter when my heart should ache.

Only the griefs which are essential things,
 The bitter fruit which all experience brings ;
 Nor only of crossed pleasures, but the creed
 Men learn who deal with nations and with kings.

All shall be counted fairly, griefs and joys,
 Solely distinguishing 'twixt mirth and noise,
 The thing which was and that which falsely seemed,
 Pleasure and vanity, man's bliss and boy's.

So I shall learn the reason of my trust
 In this poor life, these particles of dust
 Made sentient for a little while with tears,
 Till the great " may-be " ends for me in " must."

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My childhood ? Ah, my childhood ! What of it
 Stripped of all fancy, bare of all conceit ?

Where is the infancy the poets sang ?
 Which was the true and which the counterfeit ?

I see it now, alas, with eyes unsealed,
 That age of innocence too well revealed.
 The flowers I gathered—for I gathered flowers—
 Were not more vain than I in that far field.

Self was my god, the self I most despise,
 Blind in its joys and swine-like gluttonies,
 The rule of the brute beast that in us is,
 Its heaven a kitchen and a gorge its prize.

No other pleasures knew I but of sense,
 No other loves but lusts without pretence.
 Oh, childhood is but Nature unredeemed,
 Blind in desire, unshamed in ignorance.

I was all vanity and greed, my hand
Uncaring, as a panther's, whom it pained,
My nurse, my sisters, the young birds my prey.
I saw them grieve nor stopped to understand.

My mother loved me. Did I love her ? Yes,
When I had need of her to soothe distress
Or serve my wants. But when the need was by,
Others were there more dear in idleness.

These coaxed and flattered me. Their wit afforded
Edge to my wit, and I would strut and lord it
Among them a young god—for god I seemed—
Or goose—for goose I was—they still *encored* it.

Alas, poor mother ! What a love was yours !
How little profit of it all endures !
What wasted vigils, what ill-omened prayers ;
What thankless thanks for what disastrous cures !

Why did you bind yourself in such harsh fetter,
To serve a heart so hard ? It had been better
Surely to take your rest through those long nights,
Than watching on to leave me thus your debtor.

I heard but heeded not her warning voice ;
I grudged her face its sadness in my joys,
And when she looked at me I did not guess
The secret of her sorrow and my loss.

They told me she was dying, but my eyes
Brimmed not with tears. I hardly felt surprise,
Nay, rather anger at their trouble when
I asked them " what it was one does who dies."

She threw her weak arms round me, and my face
Pressed to her own in one supreme embrace ;

I felt her tears upon my cheeks all wet,
And I was carried frightened from the place.

I lost her thus who was indeed my all,
Lost her with scarce a pang whom now I call

Aloud to in the night a grieving man,
Hoar in his sins, and only clasp the wall.

* * *

This the beginning. Next my boyhood came,
Childhood embittered, its brute joys the same,

Only in place of kindness cruelty,
For courage fear, and for vain-glory shame.

Here now was none to flatter or to sue.

My lords were of the many, I the few ;

These gave command nor heeded my vain prayers.
It was their will, not mine, my hands must do.

I was their slave. My body was the prey
Of their rude sports, more savage still than they,

My every sense the pastime of their whim,
My soul a hunted thing by night and day.

Pain was my portion, hunger, wakefulness,
And cold more bitter still, and that distress

Which is unnamed of tears that dare not fall,
When the weak body grieves and none may guess.

There was no place where I might lay my head,
No refuge from the world which was my dread,

No shrine inviolate for me from my foes,
No corner quite my own, not even my bed.

I would have changed then with the meanest thing
Which has its home in the free fields in Spring,

And makes its lair in the Earth's secret dells,
Or hides in her dark womb by burrowing.

I used to gaze into the depths of Earth,
And watch the worms and beetles that have birth

Under the stones secure from outer ills,
And envy them their loneliness in mirth.

One treasure had I, one thing that I loved,

A snail with shell most delicately grooved,

And a mute patient face which seemed to see,
And horns which moved towards me as I moved.

It was like me a creature full of fear,
But happier far for its strong household gear,

The living fortress on its back wherein
Its griefs could shrink away and disappear.

I kept it in a nest, the hollow bole
Of a dead elm, and for its daily dole,

And my own comfort in its luckier state,
Brought it a lettuce I in secret stole.

It waited for my coming each new noon,
When from my fellows I could steal so soon,

And there I fed it and arranged its cell,
All through a single happy month of June.

And then—ah, then—who even now shall tell,
The terror of that moment, when with yell

Of triumph on their prize they broke and me,
And crushed it 'neath their heels, those hounds of Hell!

Even yet the thought of it makes my blood rush
Back to my temples with an angry flush ;

And for an instant, if Man's race could be
Crushed with it, God forgive me, I would crush.

Ay, God forgive me ! 'Tis an evil thought,
And thus it is that wrong on wrong is wrought,

Vengeance on vengeance by a single deed
Of violent ill or idleness untaught.

Nay, rather let me love. I will not be
Partner with Man even thus in cruelty

For one least instant, though the prize should stand,
Hate slain for ever and the Nations free.

Thus for four years I lived of slaves the slave,
Too weak to fight, too beaten to be brave.

Who mocks at impotence and coward fear
Knows little of the pangs mute creatures have.

Yet wherefore grieve ? Perhaps of all my days
This is the thing I mostly need to praise,

My chiefest treasure to have suffered wrong,
For God is cunning in His works and ways.

The sense of justice which He gives to Man
Is his own suffering, and His pity's plan

Man's own great need of pity which brims o'er
In alms to Africa and Hindostan.

And he who has not suffered nothing knows ;
Therefore I chide not at these ancient woes,

But keep them as a lesson to my pride,
Lest I should smite the meanest of my foes.

And it is ended. Kindly Death drew near
And warned them from me with his face of fear.

I did not fear him, but the rest stood awed,
As at the frown of some dread minister.

I passed out of their sight, one living still,
But dead to sense who knows not good or ill,
Their blessings were the last thing that I heard
In that dark house. I wish them only well.

* * *

What next befell me was as some have found,
Peace to their wounds upon a battle ground,
Who sleep through days of pain and nights of fear,
Conscious of nothing but their dream profound.

My dream was of a convent with smooth floors,
And whitewashed walls, a place of corridors,

Where the wind, blew in summer all day long,
And a shut garden filled with altar flowers.

Here lived in piety a score of men,
Who, having found the world a place of pain,
Or fearing it ere yet they knew it well,
Sought in God's service their eternal gain.

With these it was my privilege to be
The pensioner of their great pity's fee,
Nor favoured less for my dim soul's dark ways,
Awhile 'twixt boyhood and maturity.

My sorrow to their zeal was fruitful soil,
My wounds their pride as needing wine and oil ;
All knowledge had they to redeem and save,
Mirth, silence, prayer, and that best opiate, toil.

The garden was my task. I learned to dig,
To nail the fruit-trees, pear, and peach, and fig ;
To trim the grass plots and the box make good,
And keep the gravel smooth from leaf or twig.

Dear blessed garden ! In this night of days
I see it still with its fair formal face,
Where even the flowers looked prim, as who should ask
Pardon for beauty in so pure a place.

This for the summer. But when winter fell,
A gentler service called me from my cell,
As suited to the frailty of my needs,
To serve the mass and ring the chapel bell.

Mine was the sacristy, the care of copes,
Albs, censers, pyxes, gifts of kings and popes,
Of lace and linen and the lamps which hung
For ever lit with oil of human hopes:

There on the altar steps, as one at home,
I hourly knelt the servant of old Rome,
And learned her ritual, and assuaged my soul
With the high lessons of her martyrdom.

Not seldom in those hours the dream was mine
Of voices speaking and a call divine.
God in all ages thus has shown to men
His secret will, and I too sought a sign.

The voice that called me was a voice of good.
It spoke of feasts less vain than the world's food,
And showed me my place set a guest for aye
Of heavenly things in that calm brotherhood.

Why did I shrink ? What profit to my soul
Has the world proved that I must yield it toll ?

What its ambitions that for these my zeal
Turned backward then from its eternal goal ?

Yet thus it is. Our fallen human blood
Is ever a mixed stream 'twixt bad and good ;
And mine, perhaps, worse mingled than the rest,
Flowed in a baser, a more prurient flood.

And so it might not be. There came a day
When I must grasp my fate and choose my way,
And when my will was weaker than a child's,
And pride stood in rebellion and said nay.

There in the garden, while the thrushes sang,
I listened to his prayer with a mute pang.
That man of God who argued with my soul,
And still the vesper chorus rang and rang.

Below us a pool lay with depths profound,
And in its face I gazed as if to sound
His reason's meaning, while the rain of grace
Was shed on all things but my heart around.

" For lo," he said, " thus near us lies the end ;
A step—no more—may mar our lives or mend.
This side a little, and Hell gapes for us ;
On that side Heaven holds out strong hands, a friend.

" And he who fears is wise. Oh look," he cried,
" Here in this pool lies Death with its arms wide.
Speak. Shall I buy you life at cost of mine ?
Nay ; I would drown, though in my sin I died."

Thus Moses argued with his people, these
Than I less stubborn and less hard to please.

God on that night spoke loudly to my soul,
And I refused Him—weeping—on my knees.

Here my dream ended. From that hidden life
I went out hungry to a world of strife,

The world of pleasure, and with heart keen set
For human joy as having felt the knife.

* * *

What is the root of pleasure in Man's heart ?

The need to know made practical in part,

The shaping of the thing the soul has dreamed,
In gold or clay, with art or little art.

Youth knows not how to fashion its own pleasure ;
It deals with Fortune without scale or measure.

And so is cheated of the gold life holds,
A treasure house of hope without the treasure.

The need is there, as swallows need to fly,
The strength of wing which longs for liberty ;
The courage of the soul which upward tends,
And the eye's light, a truth which is no lie.

Behind us the past sinks, too tedious night,
Whose shadows brighter show the world of light.

And who shall say that laughter is not good,
When the blood pulses in the veins aright ?

An April morning with the birds awake ;
The sound of waters lapping by a lake ;

The scent of flowers, the rhyme of dancing feet ;
The breath of midnight with the heart aquake.

These are the moods of pleasure. And no less
The soul itself has need of wantonness.

The thirst of knowledge fired not only Eve,
And youth grieves still to guess and only guess.

We ask for wisdom. Knowledge first of all
Demands our vows from her high pedestal.

We wish ourselves in act as wise as gods,
Nor even in age dare quite our oath recall.

The truth!—to hold the actual thing and be
Bound by no law but hers and liberty.

Such was my youth's ambition, the fruit fair
And good for food of the forbidden tree.

Two things I was resolved my soul should know:
The physical meaning of the Earth below,

With its dumb forces armed for good and ill,
And its blind fires which in their cycles go ;

This, and the power of Love. Here doubly set,
The riddle stood which holds life's alphabet.

What of a very truth were God and Man ?
I dared not die till I had answered it.

And first of God. What Quixote on what steed
Of fountlered folly urged to headlong speed,

Ere chose his path more madly, or fell down
Proner on life's least lenient stones to bleed ?

Striding my horse of reason with loose rein,
I tilted at all shadows in disdain.

To each eternal I my question put,
“ What art thou, for Man's pleasure or his pain ? ”

The Maker I had worshipped, where was He,
In the Earth's fields, or the circumfluent sea ?

The footsteps of His presence on the wind,
How should I trace them through infinity ?

The huge world in its naked shape unclad,
Mocked me with silence, as a thing gone mad.

A brainless virgin, passionless and blind,
Reeling through space, unsentient—yet how sad !

The stars of heaven ! Their voices once went out
Through all a firmament in psalm and shout.

What word have they to-night ? Nay, Jesse's son
Had only mocked in our new world of doubt.

I searched them, and I numbered, and I came
To numbers only, flame evolved of flame,

Orb wheeled on orb, a meaningless machine,
A handless clock without the maker's name.

Where was my God the Father ? Not in space,
Which needs no god for glory or disgrace,

Being itself eternal. He I sought
Knew not the stars but smiled with human face.

Darkly the night looked at me ; darker still
The inner Earth with its tumultuous will,

Its legion of destroyers and destroyed,
Its law of hunger and the need to kill.

In this too was no god, or monstrous thought—
A god of endless wrong, of treason wrought

Through countless ages still against the weak.
Out of such truth if this be all it taught !

Out on such reason ! From that cave of dread
Like one despoiled of thieves I naked fled,

My thirst for knowledge slaked in bitterness,
And Earth's blank riddle all too sternly read.

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What has my youth been that I love it thus ?
The love of Woman ? Ah, thou virtuous

Dear face of wisdom which first filled my heaven,
How art thou fled from life's deserted house !

I see thee pure and noble as a vision,
Rapt in the joy of thy sublime derision

Of all things base, yet tender to the pain
Of him that loved thee spite of love's misprision.

Joyous thou wert as a Spring morning filled
With mirth of birds which strive and wive and build,

A presence of all pleasure on the Earth
Transformed through thee and with thy laughter thrilled.

True were thy eyes and pitiful thy voice,
The colour of thy cheeks how rare a choice,

The smiling of thy lips how strangely dear
When thy wit moved and made our souls rejoice !

Few years thou countedst to thy wisdom's score,
But more than mine and than thy pleasure more

I deemed thee roof and crown of womanhood,
Framed for all fame to blazon and adore.

Why wert thou fashioned thus for Earth and Man,
If only Heaven was to possess thy plan ?

Why wert thou beautiful as God to me,
If only God should see thee and should scan ?

Oh, thou wert cruel in thy ignorance,
Thou first beloved of my time's romance.

The love within thee was a light of death,
Set for a snare and luring to mischance.

What didst thou think of him, the boy untried,
To whom thou spakest of Heaven as speaks a bride ?

The love of Heaven ! Alas, thou couldst not guess
The fires he nursed or surely thou hadst lied.

His secret springs of passion had no art,
Nor loosed his tongue to any counterpart

Of mastering words. You neither feared nor knew
The rage of cursing hidden in his heart.

If thou hadst seen it, wouldst thou not have said
A soul by Satan tortured and misled ?

Thou didst not guess the truth, that in thy hand
The scourges lay, the pincers, and the lead.

Or haply didst thou love me ? Not so heaven
Possessed thee then but sometimes there were given

Glimpses which, to my later eyes of light,
Have shown new worlds as if by lightnings riven.

How had it been if I had ventured quite
That first enchanted, unforgotten night,

When I surprised thee weeping and in fear
Forbore the wrong that should have proved me right ?

How had it been if youth had been less weak,
And love's mute hand had found the wit to speak.

If thou hadst been less valiant in thy tears,
And I had touched the heaven which was thy cheek ?

Would life have been to me what now it is,
A thing of dreams half wise and half unwise,
A web unpatterned where each idler's hand
Has woven his thoughts, flowers, scrolls, and butterflies ?

Or rather, had it not, redeemed of bliss,
Grasped at new worlds less impotent than this,
And made of love a heaven ? for depths of fate
Lie in the issue of a woman's kiss.

Alas, it was not, and it may not be
Now, though the sun were melted in the sea,
And though thou livedst, and though I still should live,
Searching thy soul through all Eternity.

* * *

The ideal love, how fondly it gives place
To loves all real—alas, and flavourless.
The heart in hunger needs its meat to live,
And takes what dole it finds of happiness.

Then are strange spectacles of treason seen,
Earthquakes and tempests and the wars of men,
Shipwrecks of faith, ungodly interludes
And pagan rites to Moloch on the green.

Lust travestied as love goes nightly forth,
Preaching its creed unclean from South to North,
Using the very gestures of true love,
Its words, its prayers, its vows—how little worth !

Where are ye now, ye poor unfortunates,
Who once my partners were in these mad gaits,
Sad souls of women half unsexed by shame,
In what dire clutches of what felon fates ?

Dark-eyed I see her, her who caused my fall,
Nay, caused it not who knew it not at all.

I hear her babble her fool's creed of bliss,
While I lie mute, a swine-like prodigal.

Her chamber redolent of unctuous glooms
Prisons me yet with its profane perfumes,
A cell of follies used and cast aside,
Painted in pleasure's likeness—and a tomb's.

Oh, those dead flowers upon her table set,
How loud they preach to me of wisdom yet,
Poor slaughtered innocents there parched in Hell,
Which Heaven had seen at dawn with dewdrops wet !

Littered they lay, those maidenheads of saints,
Mid pots of fard and powder-puffs and paints,
Egregious relics of lost purity
Tortured on wires with all that mars and taints.

Beneath, upon the floor her slippers lay
Who was the queen of all that disarray,
Left where she dropped them when she fled the room
To speed her latest gallant on his way.

The pictures on the wall—by what strange chance—
Showed sacred scenes of Biblical romance ;
Among them Pilate on his judgment-seat
Washing before the multitude his hands.

Smiling he sat while in reproachful mood
He they led forth to crucifixion stood.
“ Innocent am I,” thus the legend ran
Inscribed beneath it, “ of this just One's blood.”

Innocent ! Ah, the sad forgotten thought
Of that mute face my convent dreams had sought.

And while I sighed, behold the arms of sin
In my own arms enlatticed and enwrought.

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A life of pleasure is a misnamed thing,
Soulless at best, an insect on the wing,
But mostly sad with its unconquered griefs,
The noise that frets, the vanities that sting.

The weapons of youth's armoury are these—
The chase, the dance, the gambler's ecstasies.

Each in its turn I handled with the rest,
And drained my cup of folly to the lees.

What days I murdered thus without design,
What nights deflowered in madness and lewd wine !

The ghosts of those lost hours are with me still,
Crying, " Give back my life, and mine, and mine ! "

Yet was it glorious on the scented morn
To wake the woods with clamouring hound and horn,
To ride red-coated where the red fox ran,
And shout with those who laughed to see him torn.

Glorious to lie 'neath the tall reeds in wait
For the swift fowl at flight returning late,

And pull them from their path with lightning shot,
The bolt of Jove less certain in its fate.

Glorious to battle with the crested wave
For the full nets engulfed in the sea's grave,

And see the fishes flash entangled there,
With only courage and strong arms to save.

And glorious more, with sword high-poised and still,
To meet the bull's rush with o'ermastering skill,
And watch the stricken mass in anger die,
Tamed by the potency of human will.

All glorious and vain-glorious and most sad,
Because of the dark death their doing made,
And of the nothingness that swept the track,
Leaving no footprint or of good or bad.

The light-heeled love of laughter and the dance
Held me, yet held not, in its transient trance.
The hours were few when, fired with love and wine,
I trod the Bacchanalian maze of France.

Yet do I mind me of one afternoon
In Meudon wood, when night came all too soon ;
And then again the morning, and unstayed
We pranced our measure out from noon to noon.

That day of dancing in my memory stands
A thing apart and almost of romance,
A day of pleasure physical and strong,
Unwearied and unwearying, feet, lips, hands.

The " Coq de Bruyère " was the fortunate sign
Of the lone inn where we had met to dine,
And found a score companions light as we
To turn our rustic hostel to a shrine.

If it still stands, how strangely it must view
This older world with hopes of paler hue !
Or was it youth so painted the grass green,
The apple-blossoms pink, the heavens blue ?

Alas ! I know not, nor remember yet
Her name with whom those foolish hours seemed sweet,
Only that she laughed on and danced with me,
And that my fingers just could span her feet.

How far away ! And Meudon, too, how far !
And all those souls of women lost in care,
And even fair France herself how merged in pain !
It was the Spring before the Prussian war.

One day, one only day, and then the light
Waned in the place and hid our faces white,
And, our score paid, we left the empty room
And met no more on this side of the night.

* * *

Who speaks of play speaks treason to youth's state.
Youth is the heir to passion, love and hate,
The passion of the body in its strength,
The passion of the soul commensurate.

Nought needs it in its force of whip or goad,
Say rather a strong bridle for the road.
He who would spur it to a fiercer heat
Is an ill rider whom no fortunes bode.

Shame is it that the glory of youth's eyes
Should be lack-lustred with the grape's disguise,
And doubly shame its vast desires should swoon
In maniac clutchings at a vagrant prize.

Gold is the last least noble stake of life,
When all is gone, friends, fashion, fame, love's strife,
The thing men still can chase when dotage stings
And joy is dead and gout is as the knife.

Youth, seeking gold at Fortune's hand, goes bare
Of its best weapons with the humblest there,
 As impotent to win a smile from fate
As the least valiant, the most cursed with care.

Watch well the doors of Fortune. Who goes in ?
The prince, the peasant, the gay child of sin,
 The red-cheeked soldier, the mad crook-backed crone,
Which shall prevail with Fortune ? Which shall win ?

Nay, who shall tell ? Luck levels all pretence,
Manhood's high pride, youth's first concupiscence.
 The arbiter of fame it stands and wit,
The judger supreme of sense and lack of sense.

The gambler's heaven is Youth's untimely Hell.
And I, who dwelt there as lost spirits dwell,
 There touched the bottom of the pit. Even yet
I dare not nakedly its secrets tell.

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What saved me from the gulf ? All ye who preach
Art the physician and consoling leech
 Of fallen souls, if but a single spark
Of genius lives, behold the text you teach.

In Art's high hall for whoso holds the key
Honour does service on a suppliant knee,
 Virtue his handmaid is, to work his will,
And beauty crowns him, be he bond or free.

His sad soul's raiment from his shoulders fall,
Light pure is given, and he is clothed withal,
 His eye grows single and his madness parts
As once in song the raging mood of Saul.

What saved me from the gulf ? Thrice generous hand,
A king's in gifts, a prophet's in command,

All potent intellect designed to guide,
Transforming grief as with a master's wand !

This life, if it be worthy grown, is thine ;
These tears made sweet once bitter with such brine,
This impotence of will to purpose fired,
This death fenced out with mine and countermine.

For I insensate had resolved to fly
From life's despairs and sick pride's misery,
A craven braggart to the arms of death,
And die dishonoured as the wretched die.

Thou stoodst, how oft, between me and my fate,
Bidding me cheer, or, if I dared not, wait,
From morn to night and then from night to morn
Pointing to Fame as to an open gate ;

Till Time, the healer, had half closed the wound,
And Spring in the year's mercy came back crowned
With leaves and blossoms, and I could not choose
To lie unknown forgotten underground.

* * *

If there be aught of pleasure worth the living
'Tis to be loved when trouble has done grieving,
And the sick soul, resigned to her mute state,
Forgets the pain forgiven and forgiving.

With wan eyes set upon life's door ajar
She waits half conscious of the rising star,
And lo ! 'tis Happiness on tip-toe comes
With fruits and flowers and incense from afar.

Scarcely she heeds him as he stops and smiles.
She does not doubt his innocent lips' wiles.

She lies in weakness wondering and half won,
While beauty cunningly her sense beguiles.

Then at her feet he sets his stores unrolled
Of spice and gums and treasure manifold.

All kingdoms of the Earth have tribute paid
To heap the myrrh and frankincense and gold.

These are his gifts, and tenderly he stands
With eyes of reverence and mute folded hands,
Pleading her grace, and lo ! her heaven is filled
With music as of archangelic bands.

What saved me from the gulf ? A woman's prayer
Sublimely venturing all a soul might dare,
A saint's high constancy outwitting Fate
And dowered with love supreme in its despair.

I had done naught to merit such high lot,
Given naught in hostage and adventured naught.
The gift was free as heaven's own copious rains,
And came like these unseeking and unsought.

O noble heart of woman ! On life's sea
Thou sailedst bravely, a proud argosy,
Freighted with wisdom's wealth and ordered well,
Defiant of all storms—since storms must be.

On thy high way thou passedst pursuant only
Of Virtue's purpose and Truth's instinct thronely.
Strength's symbol wert thou, self-contained and free,
Lone in thy path of good but never lonely.

What glory of the morning lit thy shrouds !
What pure thought limned thee white on thunder-clouds !

I from my shattered raft afar in pain
Kneeled to thy form and prayed across the floods.

In godlike patience, to my soul's surprise,
Thou paused and parleyed wise with me unwise.

Ah, dearest soul seraphic ! Who shall paint
The heaven revealed of pity in thine eyes ?

She took me to her riches. All the gladness
Of her great joy she gave to cure my sadness,
All her soul's garment of unearthly hopes
To ease the ache which fructified to madness.

She took me to her pleasure, wealth long stored
Of silent thought and fancy in full hoard,
Treasures of wisdom and discerning wit,
And dreams of beauty chaste and unexplored.

She took me to her heart,—and what a heart,
Vast as all heaven and love itself and art !
She gave it royally as monarchs give
Who hold back nothing when they give a part.

A king I rose who had knelt down a slave,
A soul new born who only sought a grave,
A victor from the fight whence I had fled,
A hero crowned with bays who was not brave.

Blest transformation ! Circe's ancient curse
See here interpreted in plain reverse.

Love, generous love, in me devised a spell
Ennobling all and subtler far than hers.

Thus was I saved. Yet, mark how hardly Fate
Deals with its victors vanquished soon or late.

The ransomed captive of his chains goes free.
She pines in durance who has paid the debt.

Behold this woman of all joy the heir,
Robed in high virtue and worth's worthiest wear,

A saint by saints esteemed, a matron wise
As Rome's Cornelia chastely debonnaire.

Behold her touched with my own soul's disease,
Grieving in joy and easeless still in ease,

The gall of sorrow and the thorn of shame
Twined ever in the wreaths love framed to please.

Behold her languishing for honour's loss,
Her pride nailed daily to a nameless cross,

Her vesture sullied with the dust of sin,
Her gold of purity transfused with dross.

The echo of her voice has tones that thrill :
I hear her weeping with a blind wild will.

A name she speaks to the dim night, his name
Her virtue spared not yet remembered still.

" Say, shall I comfort thee ? " " O soul of mine,
Thy comfort slays me with its joys like wine.

Thy love is dear to me—then let me go.
Bid me fare forth for aye from thee and thine."

" Is there no pleasure ? " " Pleasure is not sweet
When doors are shut and veiled Man's mercy-seat.

My heaven thou wert, but heaven itself is pain
When God is dumb and angels turn their feet."

"Is there no beauty ? See, the sun is fair
And the world laughs because the Spring is there.
Hast thou no laughter ? " " Ay, I laugh as Eve
Laughed with her lord the night of their despair."

"The past is passed." "Nay, 'tis a ghost that lives."
"Grief dies." "We slew it truly and it thrives.

Pain walks behind us like a murdered man
Asking an alms of joy which vainly gives.

"Give me thy tears : their bitterness is true.
Give me thy patience : it is all my due.
Give me thy silence, if thou wilt thy scorn,
But spare thy kisses, for they pierce me through."

I saw her perish, not at once by death,
Which has an edge of mercy in its sheath.

No bodily pleadings heralded decay ;
No violence of pity stopped her breath.

Only the eternal part which was her mind
Had withered there as by a breath unkind.

Only the reason of her eyes was mute ;
Their meaning vanished, leaving naught behind.

"No bells shall ring my burial hour," she said.

"No prayers be sung, no requiem for the dead.

Only the wind shall chaunt in its wild way,
And be thou there to lay flowers on my head."

I laid them on her grave. Alas ! dear heart,
What love can follow thee where now thou art ?

Sleep on. My youth sleeps with thee—and the rest
Would but disturb. We are too far apart.

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What has my life been ? What life has the wind
Wandering for ever on in change of mind

Winter and summer, chasing hopes as vain
And seeking still the rest it may not find ?

When she was dead I rose up in my place,
Like Israel's king, and smiled and washed my face.

My grief had died in me with her long tears,
And I was changed and maimed and passionless.

I said, " There are griefs wider than this grief,
Hopes broader harvested, of ampler sheaf.

Man may not live the caged bird of his pride,
And he who wends afar shall win relief."

The world of sea and mountain shape high browed
Lured me to dreams of nobler solitude,

Fair plains beyond the limits of the dawn,
And desert places lawless and untrod.

Beyond youth's lamp of bitter-sweet desires
And manhood's kindling of less lawful fires

A star I sought should lead me to my dream
Of a new Bethlehem and angelic choirs.

This passionate England with its wild unrest,
How has it straitened us to needs unblest !

Need is that somewhere in the world there be
A better wisdom, seek it East or West.

I sought it first on that great Continent
Which is the eldest born of man's intent.

All that the race of Japhet has devised
Of wit to live lives there pre-eminert.

The record of the ages proudly stand
Revealed in constancy and close at hand,
 Man's march triumphant against natural foes,
His conquest of the air and sea and land,

From that far day when, wielding shafts of stone,
He drove the bear back from the banks of Rhone,
 And built his dwelling on the fair lake's shore
He earliest learned to love and call his own,

On thro' the generations of wild men,
The skin-clad hunters of the field and fen,
 At war with life, all life than theirs less strong
Less fenced with cunning in its lawless den,

Until the dawn broke of a larger age,
With milder fortunes and designs more sage,
 And men raised cities on the naked plains
With wine and corn and oil for heritage.

Etruscan Italy ! Pelasgic Greece !
How did they labour in the arts of peace !
 If strong men were before the time of Troy,
What of the wise who planned their palaces ?

The men of cunning who, ere letters came
To hand their learning down from fame to fame,
 Dealt with Titanic square and basalt slab
And found the law of parallelogram ?

Unnamed discoverers, or of those who gave
Its rule to beauty, line and curve and wave,
 Smelters of bronze, artificers in gold,
Painters of tear-cups for the hero's grave ?

Or those, the last, who of Man's social state
Devised the code his lusts to mitigate,
 Who set a bridle on his jaws of pride,
And manacled with law his limbs of hate,

Till each fair town its separate polity
Enjoyed in its own walls well-fenced and free,
 With king and court and poet and buffoon
And burgess roll inscribed of chivalry ?

This was the old world's golden age renowned
Shown thro' dim glimpses of a past spell-bound.
 Some shadow of it lives in Homer's story.
In vain we search. Its like shall not be found.

It vanished in the impatient march of Man
When Empires rose, with Cyrus in the van,
 The Assyrian tyranny, the Persian scourge,
And his the all-conquering boy of Macedon.

Then were the little freedoms swept aside,
The household industries for fields more wide.
 With heavy hand Rome weighed upon the world
A blind Colossus, order classified.

And what of the new world, the world that is ?
Ah, Europe ! What a tragedy there lies !
 Thy faiths forgotten and thy laws made void,
Hunger and toil thy sole known destinies.

The sombre livery of thy bastard races
Proclaims thee slave and their ignoble faces,
 Gaul, Teuton, Serb, all fortunes merged in one,
All bloods cemmingle in thy frail embraces.

No type, no image of the God in thee,
No form survives of nobler ancestry,
No mark is on thy brow, even that of Cain,
By which to learn thy soul's lost pedigree.

Thou toilest blindly in thy central hive
Of the world's hopes impatient and alive,
Waiting the reason which shall light thy years
To a new gospel of initiative,

Rueful, unconscious, to thy labour bound
And dumb to love, above or underground.
He were the Sage of the new discipline
Who first should wake thy silence into sound.

Where is the poet who shall sing of Man
In his new world, a better Caliban,
And show him Heaven ? What nobler Prospero
To cure his ache on an Eternal plan ?

The voice that should arouse that slumbering clod
Must echo boldly as to steps unshod
Of angels heralding the advent day
Of a new Saviour and a latest God.

But whose the voice ? And where the listeners ?
I sought and found not. Rather in my ears
The discord grew of that ungodly host
Whose laughter mocks the music of the Spheres.

“ Glory of glories ! ” Thus it was they chaunted,
But not to Heaven for which men blindly panted,
Rather to that Hell's master who hath held
Their backs to pain in labour covenanted.

To him the honour and obedience due
Of their lost Moab where the bluebells blew,
Now the sad washpot of his engines' slime,
Their childhood's Edom darkened by his shoe.

Through that dim murk no glimpse of the Divine
Shall pierce with song where the sun dares not shine,
No praise of beauty in a land all bleared
With poison-smoke and waters aniline ?

Better they died unchronicled. Their room
Would then be for each weed that wreathed their tomb,
More beautiful than they with all their love
It is not worth a spray of butcher's broom.

* * *

All this I read as in an open book
Wandering in bye paths with my pilgrim's crook,
Through Alp and Apennine and Eastward on
To where the Balkans on the Danube look.

On Trajan's wall I lay in the tall grass
And watched the Tartar shepherds wandering pass.
A boy was blowing in his flute below ;
Afar the river shone, a sea of glass.

This was the world's once boundary ; and beyond
What terrors reigned for fearful hearts and fond,
The Scythian wilderness, where were-wolves were
And night for ever lay in frozen bond !

The subtle wonder of the desert came
And touched my longing with its breath of flame.
I too, methought, sad child of a new age,
Would learn its mystery and inscribe my name,

Clothed in the garments of its ancient past,
My race forgotten and my creed outcast,
On some lone pile whence centuries look down
On days unchanged the earliest with the last.

As Abraham was at Mamre on the leas,
I too would be, or Ur of the Chaldees,
Feeding my flocks in patience at God's hand,
Guided by signs and girt with mysteries.

With staff in hand and wallet for all need,
Footing the goat-tracks or with ass for steed,
Clad in mean raiment, with attendants none,
And fed on locusts as the prophets feed.

Climbing the dunes each morning to behold
The world's last miracle of light enfold
The Eastern heaven, and see the victor sun
Press back the darkness with his spears of gold.

The fair Earth, pure in her sweet nakedness,
Should smile for me each day with a new face,
Her only lover; and her virgin sands
Should be my daily sacrilege to press.

The deep blue shadows of the rocks at noon
My tent should be from a burnt world in swoon,
Rocks scored with what dead names of worshippers,
Of Gods as dead, the sun and stars and moon.

There would I stand in prayer, with unshod feet
And folded arms, at Time's true mercy seat,
Making my vows to the one God of gods
Whose praise the Nations of the East repeat.

Haply some wonder of prophetic kind
My eyes should see to the world's reason blind,
 'Some ladder to the Heaven, or a face
Speaking in thunder to me from the wind.

I lay in the tall grass, and overhead
The ravens called who once Elisha fed.

 It was a message meet for my desires,
And I arose and followed where they led,

Arose and followed ;—and behold, at hand,
With tinkling bells and tread as if on sand,
 Toward me spectral from the Orient came
The pilgrim camels of that holy Land.

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The rock of Horeb is the holiest place
Of all Earth's holies. In the wilderness

 It stands with its gaunt head bate to the heaven
As when God spake with Moses face to face.

Red in the eternal sunset of the years,
Crowned with a glory the world's evening wears,
 Where evening is with morning a first day
Unchanged in the mute music of the Spheres.

From base to top the boulder crags high thrown
Fortress the plain which Israel camped upon,
 A living presence in the unliving waste,
A couchant lion with a mane of stone.

Aloft in the dread shadow of his brows
And shut from summer suns and winter snows,
 When snows there be in the parched wilderness,
A cell I found and of it made my house.

A single hewn stone chamber, carved of old
By hermits' hands, of rocks with labour rolled,
 Undoorred, unwindowed, with the earth for floor,
Within, an altar where their beads they told.

Without, a rood of soil and a scant spring,
Their garden once, where deep in the vast ring
 Of those grave granite domes they delved and prayed,
One thorn tree its sole life left blossoming.

There laid I down the burden of my care
And dwelt a space in the clean upper air.
 I dwelt, how many days or months or years
I know not, for I owned no calendar ;

Only the rising of the winter's sun
Daily more northward as the months moved on,
 Only the sun's return along his ways
When summer slackened his first rage outrun ;

Only the bee-birds passing overhead
With their Spring twitter and eyes crimson red,
 The storks and pelicans in soldier bands,
The purple doves that stayed to coo and wed ;

These and the shepherds of the waste, the few
Poor Bedouin clansmen, with their weak flocks, who
 Strayed through the valleys at appointed days,
As water failed them or the herbage grew,

Lean hungry-eyed wild-sons of Ishmael
Who climbed the rocks and sought me in my cell
 With their poor wares of butter, dates and corn
And almond-oake in skins and hydromel,

Unwise in the world's learning, yet with gleams
Of subtler instinct than the vain world deems,

Glimpses of faiths transmitted from afar
In signs and wonders and revealed in dreams.

They taught me their strange knowledge, how to read
The forms celestial ordered to Man's need,

To count on sand the arrow heads of fate
And mark the bird's flight and the grey hare's speed.

The empty waste informed with their keen eyes
Became a scroll close writ with mysteries

Unknown to reason yet compelling awe
With that brave folly which confounds the wise.

Nor less the faith was there of the revealed
God of their fathers, Ishmael's sword and shield,

Their own, the Merciful, the Compassionate,
By martyrs witnessed in the stricken field.

His name was on their lips, a living name.

His law was in their hearts, their pride in shame.

His will their fortitude in hours of ill
When the skies rained not and the locusts came.

I learned their creed in this as in the rest,
Making submission to God's ways as best.

What matter if in truth the ways were His,
So I should abdicate my own unblest !

And thus I might have lived,—and died, who knows,
A Moslem saint, on those high mountain brows,

Prayed to by alien lips in alien prayer
As intercessor for their mortal woes,

Lived, died, and been remembered for some good
In the world's chronicle of brotherhood,
Nor yet through strife with his own Bedlam kind,
The Hydra-headed Saxon multitude.

But for the clamour of untimely war,
The sound of Nations marching from afar.

Their voice was on the tongue of winds and men,
Their presaging in sun and moon and star.

* * *

I dreamed a dream of our fair mother Earth
In her first beauty, ere mankind had birth,

Peopled with forms how perfect in design,
How rich in purpose, of what varied worth,

Birds, four-foot beasts and fishes of the Sea
Each in its kind and order and degree

Holding their place unchid, her children all,
And none with right to strain her liberty.

Her deep green garment of the forest glade
Held monsters grim, but none was there afraid.

The lion and the antelope lay down
In the same thicket for their noon-day shade.

The tyranny of strength was powerless all
To break her order with unseemly brawl.

No single kind, how stout soe'er of limb,
Might drive her weakest further than the wall.

All was in harmony and all was true
On the green Earth beneath her tent of blue.

When lo, the advent of her first born lie,
The beast with mind from which her bondage grew.

O woeful apparition ! what a shape
To set the world's expectancy agape,
To crown its wonders ! what lewd naked thing
To wreck its Paradise ! The human ape !

Among the forms of dignity and awe
It moved a ribald in the world of law,
In the world's cleanness it alone unclean,
With hairless buttocks and prognathous jaw.

Behold it in that Eden once so fair,
Pirate and wanton, a blind pillager,
With axe and fire and spade among the trees
Blackening a league to build itself a lair.

Behold it marshalling its court,—soft kine,
And foolish sheep and belly-lorded swine,
Striding the horse anon, high-mettled fool,
And fawned on by the dog as one divine.

Outrage on sense and decent Nature's pride !
Feast high of reason—nay of Barmecide,
Where every guest goes hungry but this one,
The Harpy-clawed, too foul to be denied !

I saw it, and I blushed for my Man's race,
And once again when in the foremost place
Of human tyranny its latest born
Stood threatening conquest with an English face.

Chief of the sons of Japhet he, with hand
Hard on the nations of the sea and land,
Intolerant of all, tongues, customs, creeds,
Too dull to spare, too proud to understand.

I saw them shrink abashed before his might,
Like tropic birds before the sparrow's flight.

The world was poorer when they fled. But he
Deemed he had done "God" service and "his right."

I saw it and I heard it and I rose
With the clear vision of a seer that knows.

I had a message to the powers of wrong
And counted not the number of my foes.

I stood forth in the strength of my soul's rage
And spoke my word of truth to a lewd age.

It was the first blow struck in that mad war,
My last farewell to my fair hermitage.

O God of many battles! Thou that art
Strong to withstand when warriors close and part,
That art or wast the Lord of the right cause!
How has thy hand grown feeble in its smart!

How are the vassals of thy power to-day
Set in rebellion mastering the fray!

Blaspheming Thee they smite with tongues obscene,
While these Thy saints lie slaughtered where they pray.

How is the cauldron of thy wrath the deepest,
Cold on its stones? No fire for it thou heapest.

Thou in the old time wert a jealous God.
Thieves have dishonoured Thee. And lo, Thou sleepest!

Between the camps I passed in the still night,
The breath of heaven how pure, the stars how bright.

On either hand the life impetuous flowed
Waiting the morrow which should crown the fight.

How did they greet it ? With what voice, what word,
What mood of preparation for the sword ?

On this side and on that a chaunt was borne
Faint on the night-wind from each hostile horde.

Here lay the camps. The sound from one rose clear,
A single voice through the thrilled listening air.

"There is no God but God," it cried aloud.
"Arise, ye faithful, 'tis your hour of prayer."

And from the other ? Hark the ignoble chorus,
Strains of the music halls, the slums before us.

Let our last thought be as our lives were there,
Drink and debauchery ! The drabs adore us.

And these were proved the victors on that morrow,
And those the vanquished, fools, beneath war's harrow.

And the world laughed applauding what was done,
And if the angels wept none heard their sorrow.

* * *

What has my life been in its last best scene,
Stripped of Time's violence, its one serene

Experience of things fair without a flaw,
Its grasp of Heaven's own paradisal green ?

After the storm the clouds white laughter fly ;
After the battle hark the children's cry !

After the stress of pain, if God so will,
We too may taste our honey ere we die.

What little secret 'tis we need discover !
How small a drop to make the cup brim over !

A single word half spoken between two,
And Heaven is there, the loved one and the lover.

Tell me not, thou, of youth as Time's last glory.
Tell not of manhood when it strikes its quarry.

The prime of years is not the prime of pleasure.
Give me life's later love when locks are hoary,

Love, when the hurry and the rush are past,
Love when the soul knows what will fade what last,
The worth of simple joys youth trampled on,
Its pearl of price upon the dunghill cast.

Time was, I mocked, I too, at life's plain blisses,
The rustic treasure of connubial kisses,
The bourgeois wealth of amorous maid and man
Made man and wife in legal tendernesses.

Time was, but is not, since the scales of pride
Fell from my eyes and left me glorified.
Now 'tis the world's turn. Let it laugh at me,
Who care not, having Love's self on my side.

How came I by this jewel, this sweet friend,
This best companion of my lone life's end ?
So young she was, so fair, of soul so gay,
And I with only wisdom to commend.

I looked into her eyes and saw them seek
My own with questions, roses on her cheek.
One sign there is of love no words belie,
The soul's wide windows watching where lips speak.

What wouldst thou with me, thou dear wise one, say ?
My face is withered, my few locks are grey.
Time has dealt with me like a dolorous Jew.
My gold he holds ; in silver now I pay.

How shall I serve thee ? Shall I be thy priest,
To read thy dear sins to the last and least ?

I have some knowledge of the ways of men,
Some too of women. Wilt thou be confessed ?

Nay, but thou lovest ? A gay youth and fair ?
Is he less kind to thee than lovers are ?

Shall I chastise him for his backward ways,
Teach him thy whole worth and his own despair ?

Thou dost deny ? Thou lovest none ? To thee
Youth, sayest thou, is void, mere vanity.

Yet how to build up life and leave out love,
The corner stone of all its joys to be ?

Thou wouldst be wise. Thou swearest to me this.
Know then, all wisdom is but happiness.

So thou art happy, there is none more sage
Than thou of the wise seven famed of Greece.

She did not answer me, but heaved a sigh
And raised her eyes, where tears stood, silently.

I kissed her hands, the outside and the in,
“ Child, dost thou love me ? ” And she whispered “ Ay.”

Thus the thing happened. And between us two
Was now a secret beautiful and new.

We hid it from all eyes as fearing ill,
And cherished it in wonder, and it grew.

Some say that Heaven is but to be with God,
Hell—but without God—the same blest abode.

How wide the difference only those may know
Whose eyes have seen the glory and the cloud.

We two beheld the glory. Every morn
We rose to greet it with the day new born;
No laggards we when Love was in the fields
Waiting to walk there with us in the corn.

O those first hours of the yet folded day,
While Man still sleeps and Nature has its play,
When beast and bird secure from death and him
Wander and wanton in their own wild way.

These were our prize untroubled by the whim
Of slugging fools still wrapped in dreamings dim.
In these we lived a whole life ere their day
And heard the birds chaunt and the seraphim.

How good it was to see her through the grass,
Pressing to meet me with her morning face
Wreathed in new smiles by the sweet thought within
Triumphant o'er the world and worldlings base!

How good to mark her beauty decked anew
With leaf and blossom, crimson, white and blue!
The beechen spray fresh gathered in her hand
Was her queen's sceptre diamonded with dew.

I heard her young voice long ere she was near,
Calling her call-note of the wood dove clear.
It was our signal. And I answered low
In the same note, "Beloved, I am here."

And then the meeting. • Who shall count the bliss
Of sweet words said and sweeter silences.
It was agreed between us we should wed
Some happy day nor yet forestall a kiss.

Sublime convention by true lovers made

To try their joy more nearly in the shade.

“Not yet, dear love ! Thy nad lips take from mine,
Lest thou shouldst harm me and the world upbraid.”

Who says a wedding day is not all white

From dawn to dusk, nay far into the night ?

The man who makes not that one day divine
Dullard is he and dastard in Love's sight.

First day of the new month, the honeymoon,

Last of the old life naked and alone.

The apparent heirship come to actual reign,
The entrance in possession of a throne.

Why grudge rejoicings ? The vain world is there.

It sees the feast spread that it may not share.

God's angels envy thee ; then why not these ?
Let them make merry with thy wealth to spare.

Nay, join it thou. The foolish old life waits,

A slave discharged, to see thee to the gatts.

Give it thy bounty, though it claim thy all,
Thy clothes, thy bed, thy empty cups and plates.

The world hath loved thee, or it loved thee not,

What matter now ! Thou needest raise no doubt.

All smile on thee to-day, the false, the true.
The new king pardons. Shout then with their shout.

Thy friends surround thee, sceptics of thy reason.

They ply thee gaily in and out of season.

Thou in thy heart the while art far away
True to thy god. Thou heedest not their treason.

Proud in the face of all thou vowest thy vow,
 Love in thine eyes and glory on thy brow,
 Thou hast sworn to cherish her, to have, to hold,
 "Till death us twain do part." Ah she! Ah thou!

* * *

What has my life been? Nay, my life is good.
 Dear life, I love thee, now thou art subdued.
 Thou hast fled the battle, cast thine arms away,
 And so art victor of the multitude.

Thou art forgotten wholly of thy foes,
 Of thy friends wholly, these alike with those.
 One garden of the world thy kingdom is
 Walled from the wicked, and there blooms thy rose.

She that I love lives there and lives with me.
 Enough, kind heaven, I make my terms with thee.
 Worth, wealth, renown, power, honour—shadows all!
 This is the substance, this reality.

O world that I have known! how well, things, men,
 Glories of vanity, the sword, the pen!
 Fair praise of kings, applause of crowds—nay more,
 Saints' pure approval of the loss and gain!

High deeds of fame which made the eyelids brim
 With tears of pride grief's anguish could not dim,
 The day of triumph crowning all the days,
 The harvest of the years brought home by Time!

What are you to Man's heart, his soul, his sense
 Prouder than this, more robed in incidence?
 The cry of the first babe, his own, and hers,
 Thrilling to joy? Ah matchless eloquence!

The wisdom of all Time is in that cry,
The knowledge of Life's whence, at last, and why,
 'The root of Love new grafted in the tree,
Even as it falls, which shall not wholly die.

To rest in a new being! Here it stands
The science of all ages in all lands,
 The joy which makes us kin with the Earth's life,
And knits us with all Nature joining hands,

Till we forget our heritage of gloom,
Our dark humanity how near its doom.
 Away! Man's soul was a disease. 'Tis fled
Scared by this infant face of perfect bloom.

And so, farewell, poor passionate Life, the past.
I close thy record with this word, "Thou wast."
 Why wait upon the Future? Lo To-day
Smiles on our tears, Time's toy, his best and last.

END OF VOL. I

